Truth or Trap:
the Australian contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals

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Abstract

The contemporary crafts movement was a phenomenon in the Western world, including Australia, from the 1940s.

Its roots were in the philosophies of the British Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century, and in the simultaneous expression of ideals of a new democracy through community life that included aspirations towards self-suffiency through crafts production. It was encouraged by progressive education policies from the 1920s and the related model of expressive individualism in the United States from the 1940s. It also reflected post-war responses to ideals of economic 'progress', to domestic consumerism, to new industrial products and processes and to the development of Modernism in art, design and industry.

The leaders of the contemporary crafts movement used the terms 'the crafts' or 'craft' as an umbrella for a wide range of practices under which to present a perception of cohesive identity and political force. In the early 1970s the movement gained the support of government funding, influenced the inclusion of crafts courses in educational institutions and developed a wide popular marketplace.

The contemporary crafts movement's early ideals and values placed an emphasis on the revival or re-invention of traditions of skilfully making beautiful, utilitarian objects by hand from natural materials. From the late 1960s, however, in seeking the status of art and artists, an increasing number of craftspeople started to pursue instead, the ideals followed by the fine arts at that time, ideals that themselves shifted during the 1970s and were contrary to crafts traditions.

This thesis will review the historical background of the Australian contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, discuss the tensions that developed between different philosophies of crafts practice and account for the parallel relationship with design and industry. In particular, it will review the subsequent effect of the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals.

While the influence of art ideals clearly served to successfully challenge conservative aspects of crafts traditions, I will argue that the pursuit of these ideals also contributed to a loss of identity in crafts practice, a loss that has been under review from the mid-1980s.

I will argue that craftspeople should have confidence in acknowledging and valuing the wider histories and traditions that underlie their contemporary practice, including, but not without critical appraisal of, the influence of contemporary art values.

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I would like to thank the Tasmanian School of Art, part of the Centre for the Arts in the University of Tasmania, for accepting my proposal to submit a thesis based on work I had previously researched and published. Special thanks must go to my supervisor Llewellyn Negrin as well as, for the first year, associate supervisor, Associate Professor Rod Ewins, and in the final stages Associate Professor Jonathan Holmes and Professor Geoff Parr.

Very warm thanks must still go to all those who were involved in the original research project, and I gratefully acknowledge their contribution to my book *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* (1992).

I am also grateful to the Powerhouse Museum for granting study leave that enabled a number of brief periods of continued effort in the development of the thesis.

Plate 1: Stephen Bowers
(see page 196) *Cockylorum 1,2,3*, detail of porcelain plate decorated with painted, splashed and airbrushed underglaze slips under a clear glaze, made in Adelaide in 1991. (12 x 62cm)

The title of this work refers to a well-known children's chasing game. Painstakingly painting and drawing over a white slip or on a light-bodied clay Stephen Bowers (b.1952) manages to condense the roughly two-thousand-year history of porcelain decoration, tin-glaze, lustred maiolica and china-painting onto contemporary works that also say something particular about his view of Australia.

Contents

Plate 2: Catherine Truman

(see page 183) *Piecemeal*, boat carved in English lime wood, with hanko ink and paint; fish pieces carved in mother-of-pearl, with ink, made in Adelaide in 1992. (boat 20 x 6 x 3: fish pieces 3 x 3 x 1.5cm) Trained as a jeweller, Truman (b.1957) studied further in Japan in 'netsuke' carving and inlay work. The materials and process are deeply satisfying for her, and are important in establishing a relationship with the viewer. This work is part of a series called *Lifeboat*, where the boats and fish are metaphors for issues to do with inner and outer lives, journeys, passengers, ambiguous narratives, individuals and society. *Piecemeal* explores the fragility of the spirit; the broken fish is to do with questions of immortality. Interview, Catherine Truman 1995.

Introduction: The Australian contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals

Truth or trap?

The contemporary crafts movement, sometimes called the crafts revival, was a phenomenon in the Western world, including Australia, from the 1940s.

Its roots were in both the philosophies of the British Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century that sought to unite art with craft skills in the production of beautiful and useful items for the domestic environment, and in the simultaneous expression of ideals of a new democracy through community life that included aspirations towards self-sufficiency through crafts production.

This movement developed in Australia through the further influence of the need for innovative 'making-do' with materials at hand during the economic depression of the 1930s and through the opportunities provided by rehabilitation training programs following World War II. It was encouraged by the progressive education policies from the 1920s to the 1940s that were to do with the development of the whole self, and the related model of expressive individualism in the United States from the 1940s.

The contemporary crafts movement also reflected post-war responses to ideals of economic and industrial 'progress', to domestic consumerism, to new industrial products and processes and to the development of Modernism in art, design and industry. It was very much involved with renewed assertions of national identity yet also reflected an interest in the social purpose, cultural meaning and skilled practices of traditional village crafts in the third world.

Almost from the outset, the movement comprised a number of groups who held different ideas about what the crafts, and a craft practice, might be. There was always a tension between a revival of the crafts and the changing ideals of both art and design.

The leaders of the movement used the terms 'the crafts' or 'craft' as an umbrella for a wide range of practices under which to present a perception of cohesive identity and political force. By the 1960s, through organised national bodies, the Australian movement started to develop an influential support structure for information, education and advocacy. It eventually involved thousands of practitioners (working in ceramics, textiles, jewellery, metalwork, glass, woodwork, furniture, leather and paper) who reflected and influenced many of the values and perceptions of contemporary social and cultural life. In the early 1970s it gained the support of government funding, began to further influence the inclusion of crafts courses in educational institutions and infiltrated and, to a certain extent, duplicated the emerging dealer gallery system of the art world.

From the 1950s the ideals and values associated with the development of an organised movement were generally agreed, initially, by practitioners in all media. The contemporary crafts movement's early ideals and values placed an emphasis on the revival of traditions of skilfully making beautiful, utilitarian objects by hand from natural materials. Craftspeople were interested in independence and self-sufficiency, working in a studio or small workshop environment where they were in control of all the processes of their production yet within a framework of social responsibility and a sense of community. In many ways these aspirations have since been identified as an anachronistic, romantic 're-invention' of tradition, but at that time they were certainly (and, for many, remain) central to a strong philosophy that ran counter to the perceived inhumanity of consumerism and industrial production.

From the late 1960s, however, an increasing number of Australian crafts practitioners started to abandon the early philosophies of the post-war movement. They started to pursue instead, the ideals followed by the fine arts at that time; the ideals of late Modernism. Co-ordinating, multi-crafts organisations had developed in Australia following models from overseas, especially from Britain (where organisations were developed to foster and promote British crafts and design after the war), and also from the United States. At that time it was possible for visual artists, particularly in New York, to become superstars: expressive individuals who were backed and promoted by an infrastructure of dealers, critics, and investors. Visual artists in Australia aspired to emulate or join the international 'art world': an art world of the 'fine' or 'visual' arts, its distinction well-reinforced through cultural institutions, which tended to consider little other than painting and sculpture as art.

Craftspeople in the United States were educated in universities, alongside visual artists and many of the designers and architects who had fled from Europe, and were active through their organisations and institutions in claiming a similar status as 'expressive individuals' in their own practice. Craftspeople in Australia had not had a strong institutional framework to endorse their alternative philosophical position to the visual arts infrastructure, and the various organisations and courses that were to provide an alternative influential framework for interior and industrial design were themselves simultaneously developing their own voices.

Thus many of the key lobbyists in the developing crafts organisations adopted the models and aspirations of modernist art. A form of 'art-craft' practice emerged, and the language of the fine arts was used to validate the work. There were two main characteristics of this shift: an emphasis on the craftsperson as an artist - an expressive individual who stood apart from markets and audiences (because that was what artists appeared to do); and an interest in making 'non-functional' objects (because they believed it brought their work closer to 'art'). It was attractive to craftspeople to also be among

those who were expressing their individual selves, through making expressive, non-functional 'art-craft' objects.

Then, in the 1970s, visual artists moved away from the prescriptive, formalist ideals of late Modernism and rejected not only an interest in materials, techniques and processes, but even rejected 'the object', in favour of minimal and conceptual art, and temporal 'performance' works where the idea was more important than the object. Many craftspeople chose to stay with the new-found freedom of expressive 'non-functional' form, while others pursued the new 'conceptual' direction. Following the lead of the visual artists of the time, this group denied many of the previously agreed central ideals of crafts practice: valuing skill in the use of hands and tools, taking pleasure in working with materials, seeing the validity of function as a purpose for production and acknowledging the legitimacy of working for a client. Either way, it was very challenging to be so liberated from what could be very conservative traditions. In doing so, while certainly changing and overturning conservative perceptions about what the crafts might be, they set in train the beginnings of a denial of their own social and technological histories and values. This pattern was largely to remain until the questioning of cultural hegemonies began to appear in the crafts in Australia in the mid-1980s.

There was also another strand: that of a connection with designing for industry. At first, craftspeople by and large rejected industrial associations, and, in any case, it was not common practice for industry in Australia to use local designers. Moreover, craft-based industries in ceramics, textiles and glass were declining in the 1960s. Nonetheless, at the same time that craftspeople looked to art as an ideal, there was a parallel interest in the role and status of the designer as an individual, as demonstrated through the special roles they played in the factories of Italy and Scandinavia, and the development of design as an organised professional occupation in Australia. In turn, artists and designers also influenced each other, so the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals also included a reassessment of the role and status of the designer.

The contemporary crafts movement was a phenomenon of contradictions: conservative yet radical; social yet individual; evangelistic yet therapeutic; specialist and separatist and yet seeking to join and share equal status with art. By the late 1970s the movement could be said to have succeeded, in many ways, in its aim to establish an equivalent status to the fine arts. Encouraged by the lobby of the crafts movement, educational institutions, government funding bodies and the marketplace simultaneously supported both the revival of 'the crafts' as well as their pursuit of both 'craft as art' and 'craft as design' ideals.

However, even though it did not represent the greater proportion of crafts practice, the 'craft as art' ideal became dominant. Validation for crafts practice was found more through the language and values of the fine arts, and less from its other contributing traditions. Institutions like art and design schools, the main art and design magazines, the history books, and the

lecturers at the time, tended to use art values and art language to describe whatever people were doing. Even specialist crafts journals, that published mainly technical issues and some issues of life style, tended to place greater value on objects they felt they could describe as 'art'.

The art world, however, rarely accepted the crafts as art no matter which way craftspeople approached their work. Indeed, a number of visual artists who were questioning the role of art in a changing society were to more successfully use crafts media and their histories to investigate the social and cultural meanings of crafts practices in relation to the artworld.

How and why did the shifts towards an art ideal occur? What were the effects of these changes in direction? How were the new values reinforced and challenged? Did the changes liberate the crafts or trap them in an inappropriate discourse? This thesis will review the historical background of this phenomenon, discuss the tensions that developed between different philosophies of crafts practice, account for the parallel relationship with design and industry; and, in particular, review the subsequent effect of the crafts movement's pursuit of the ideals of the fine arts.

While the influence of art ideals clearly served to successfully challenge conservative aspects of crafts traditions, I will argue that the pursuit of these ideals also contributed to a loss of identity in crafts practice, a loss that has been under review from the mid-1980s. Despite the liberating challenges offered by the fine arts, the dependence of the crafts movement on the structures and values of the art world and the associated denial of some of the specific characteristics of crafts practice has, in many instances, also had a detrimental effect.

Uncritical adherence to the 'truth' of crafts processes has been a trap because it can lead to virtuosity for its own sake. However, the uncritical pursuit of art values has also been a trap: more often than not it has produced work that has been at odds with changing art values and therefore has not been accepted by the art world anyway. The pursuit of art ideals has resulted in a great deal of work in the last thirty years that has been so confused in its resolution of idea with form that it has not been successful as either art, craft or design.

I will argue that craftspeople should have confidence in acknowledging and valuing the wider histories and traditions that underlie their contemporary practice, including, but not without critical appraisal of, the influence of contemporary art values.

As well as addressing the main topic of the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, the thesis will co-incidentally discuss the way that the art world itself failed to include the crafts movement in its records of Australian art or cultural history, and what this has meant to crafts ideals.

Scope of research

This thesis draws on the research for my published work, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History*, commissioned by the Crafts Board of the Australia Council in 1985 and published by the NSW University Press in 1992, as well as a number of conference papers and published articles discussing issues of crafts identity that came out of that research between 1991 and 1997 (see Bibliography). To develop the more focused topic of the thesis, new research was carried out between 1995 and 1998.

The contemporary crafts movement has sometimes been accounted for in decorative arts histories as the 'crafts revival', by, for example, Philippe Garner (1980) and Peter Dormer (eg. 1990), and by Edward Lucie-Smith as a second Arts and Crafts movement (1981), but there has been no comprehensive documentation of its history and significance in any of the countries outside Australia where it occurred. The American Crafts Museum has now embarked on a 10-year multi-volume project, with three titles published by 1996, and the Crafts Council of Great Britain (now of England) has similarly been working on the documentation of its history.

Bernard Smith, in his 1975 article 'Art, Craft and the Community', reprinted in *Death of the Artist as Hero* in 1988, appears to be the only art historian who has referred to the Australian crafts movement in the broad context of art practice, although Margaret Lord briefly acknowledged the growing role of what was then known as the Craft Association of Australia in her book, *An Interior Decorator's World* in 1969, and John McPhee provided a 'first' overview (in an art book) of the decorative arts in collections in Leon Paroission's *Australian Art Review* in 1983. The movement does not feature in Australian general social histories (like Donald Horne's *Australian People*), or histories that account for other diverse art practices (like Paul Taylor's *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980*). Some crafts practitioners are referred to in art histories but only where their primary practice is painting or sculpture (like Arthur Boyd and John Perceval in Geoffrey Serle's *From the Desert the Prophets Come*).

From the early 1980s publications with a sociological approach (like Janet Wolff's *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, Howard Becker's *Art Worlds*, Roszika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses*, Peter Dormer's *Meaning of Modern Design*, Adrian Forty's *Objects of Desire* and Penny Sparke's *Design in Context*) offered a way of understanding cultural marginalisation, and a way of reassessing aspects of crafts practice not valued by the art world. Brian Stoddart, in *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, provided a fascinating parallel for the visual arts and crafts with his account of the economic, social and political contrasts between sport and games in Australia. However, nothing could be found during the primary research period between 1986 and 1992 that offered a similar analysis of Australian crafts practice. Most of the small number of specific publications on aspects of crafts practice in Australia by the 1990s had focused on a description of practitioners and

their work rather than a discussion of the significance of their contribution in a broader cultural context.

The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History (1992) brought together within a broad Australian cultural history, documentation and analysis of the movement, its precursors and its overseas counterparts. It attempted to address the movement's significance as a cultural phenomenon and provide an explanation for its marginalisation in Australian cultural history. The research drew on interviews, and personal and institutional archives as well as a number of significant recent specific histories, for example, Peter Timms's *Australian Studio Pottery and China Painting 1900-1950*, Jenny Zimmer's *Stained Glass in Australia*, Caroline Miley's *Beautiful and Useful: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Tasmania*, Glenn Cooke and Deborah Edwards's *L.J. Harvey and his School*, and Anne Gray's *Line, Light and Shadow: James W R Linton*, all published in 1986.

By the time *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* was published, articles had started to appear that addressed some of the theoretical issues explored in the book (for example, by Jenny Zimmer, Anne Brennan, Nola Anderson, Sue Rowley, Robert Nelson and Peter Timms). Conferences now included papers on theoretical issues, for example *The Social Context of the Crafts* by Craft Australia in 1988, *Interventions*, on crafts and curatorship, by the University of Wollongong in 1992, and most specialist crafts conferences. Journals such as *Object*, *Craft Victoria*, *CraftWest* and *Art Monthly Australia* now specifically addressed issues of identity and value in the crafts. Some collections of essays were also published, like Noris Ioannou's *The Culture Brokers* (1989) and *Craft in Society, an Anthology of Perspectives* (1992), and Bob Thompson's *Forceps of Language* (1992). Other publications, like Jenny Isaacs's *The Gentle Arts*, documented specific aspects of the crafts, in this case domestic crafts, but did not address the cultural significance of the crafts movement itself. Overseas, the British *Crafts* magazine and *American Craft* were among those that provided some useful comment on these issues while tending to celebrate 'craft-as-art'.

By the late 1980s changes in the economic climate, and changes in taste and values, had affected both the ideals and provisions for both funding and education in the visual arts and crafts. A number of reports and surveys, by, for example, the Australia Council, documented the changing pattern and expectations of arts practice, including the crafts, and speculated on its future.

Terminology:

Throughout the period under discussion, the meanings of many of the terms used have changed. I have chosen to use certain words, at different times, in the following ways:

Craft:
In my view, this word should be used either as an approach towards a way of working (something is well-crafted), or the description of a type of working practice (weaving is a craft; weaving and pottery are crafts). I have not used it as a category of objects (making art or craft): I have preferred to talk about 'the crafts' or 'crafts practice' rather than 'craft'. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 6, 'A new pursuit?'

Craftspeople:
Since the word 'craftsman' was abandoned as an exclusive term, many alternatives have been used, such as 'craftworkers', 'crafts practitioners' and 'craftspeople'. When speaking about the broad field I have tended to use the latter two, depending on the context: 'crafts practitioner' implies a slightly wider interpretation of the range of activities need to carry out the work or professional practice of being a craftsperson, and is compatible with the commonly used term 'art practitioner'. Many crafts practitioners prefer to describe themselves very specifically, for example as potters and jewellers. Some choose the word 'artist' (as in glass artist), and others choose the term 'designer' (as in textile designer). Some see their practice more as 'designer-makers'. I have used these terms where I know them to be appropriate to the context and to the people concerned.

Art:
This term is most commonly identified as the practice of painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, and also for the objects made as a result of the practice. In recent years, in order to be more inclusive of diverse practices, the terms 'art practice', 'art work', or simply, 'work', are more commonly used by artists themselves. Thus, sometimes, in certain contexts, I have also used these terms for the works made by craftspeople: this depends on the way people identify themselves, the way others identify them, or where a discussion may need a very broad inclusive term. 'Sculpture' is a particularly value-laden term, and in relation to crafts practice I have preferred to use the term 'sculptural form' which provides a physical description with less evaluative judgement.

Artist:
As above. There is no 'correct' term. For some time many art practitioners have been unhappy with the connotations that surround the term 'artist', and have chosen a range of alternatives, for example, cultural worker, cultural producer, art practitioner, artworker. I have tended to use 'artist' or 'art practitioner', depending on the context, to be most broadly inclusive of a range of practices, sometimes including craftspeople, and sometimes including writers and performers.

Fine arts/ Visual arts:
'Fine arts' is a term that has academic associations with painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, and generally refers to objects that are non-utilitarian. It therefore excludes works historically categorised as the decorative arts, applied arts, useful arts or the crafts. I have used all these terms in contexts where the narrative required a comparison to be made, usually in a historical context. The term 'visual arts' is sometimes interchangeable with the 'fine arts', but I have used it where a more specific or more colloquial meaning was needed, often as a direct comparison with the crafts or design, pertinent to the topic of this thesis. I have also used 'visual arts' when making a comparison with other art forms, for example, the performing arts, or when it has been commonly used by others (eg. the Visual Arts Board).

Applied arts, decorative arts, useful arts:
These terms have been used over time by historians, museums and educational institutions, and all have slightly different meanings. All generally refer to objects that are not the 'fine arts', that is, they are functional or decorative objects not necessarily classed as sculpture. I have used them where the context has been appropriate to the time or the institution. 'Decorative arts' is the term most currently used, for example, in museums that have historical as well as contemporary holdings, and is often now combined with 'design' as in 'decorative arts and design' to allow a broader interpretation of the collections. Sometimes the term 'contemporary applied arts' is now used. 'The crafts' in the museum context is too narrow a term to replace these words; it represents a part of the overall holdings, and also overlaps with other holdings, for example, domestic crafts. Some art museums use the term 'crafts and design'.

Design:
This term is generally used to mean, firstly, the process of planning something that is going to be made (I am designing it), and secondly, the way the object looks and functions (it is a good design). It is used by those craftspeople who have a greater interest in making useful objects than in making art, although they would still want to be identified as creative individuals and would expect the terms 'designer' and 'artist' to have equal status. 'Design' carries implications that the object may be executed by someone other than the designer, although a 'designer-maker' is one who is able to carry out both functions, even though some work might be carried out elsewhere.

Art world/Craft world:
The term 'art world' is most commonly used to describe the wide infrastructure that supports 'visual arts' or 'fine arts' practice. However, because of current institutional structures, it is now sometimes used to describe everyone working in the visual arts and crafts world (for example in

relation to the constituency of the Visual Arts/Craft Board). Sometimes the term 'art world' is used to encompass all the arts, including performing and literary arts, for example, when lobbying at election time. In recent years the term 'art industry' has sometimes been used instead, in this context, to reflect efforts by artists and their infrastructures across all fields to be seen as a legitimate part of the work force. In the specific context of this thesis, I have mostly used the term 'art world' as a means of distinguishing the 'fine arts' or 'visual arts' from other visual practices such as 'the crafts', and the specific ideology and infrastructure of the 'craft world'.

Format of thesis:
The format of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Context of research: conflicting philosophies
This chapter will provide examples of the changing philosophies of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia in its shift from 'traditional' values in the 1950s towards art - and design - ideals from the 1960s. It will contrast those views with recent critical responses to some of the contemporary craftwork that has resulted from these ideals, and identify the issues raised as the subject of the thesis, to be discussed in subsequent chapters. It will also summarise the current context for research and writing on this subject, and raise as a matter of concern the inadequate inclusion of decorative arts histories in art history/theory courses.

Chapter 2: Between 'beautiful and useful' and 'form follows function': art, craft and design ideals to the 1960s
This chapter will briefly identify the history of the separation of 'art' from 'craft', then consider the background of the early ideals of the contemporary crafts movement. The movement's sources will be found in the educational and cultural philosophies of both the Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century (as beautiful and useful) and the development of Modernism (as form follows function) in the early 20th century. In the context of post-war responses to Modernism, the chapter will look particularly at the development of crafts communities and specialist crafts groups that were an expression of a shared philosophy and identity where most were interested in making beautiful and useful utilitarian items in the context of a supportive community.

Chapter 3: The crafts as art: a shift in ideology, 1960s and 1970s
This chapter will look at the ways in which the contemporary crafts movement in Australia responded to social changes, and to both contemporary art and design in the 1960s and 1970s. It will show the development within the movement of different ideas about what the crafts and crafts practice might be, and focus on those who began to pursue the ideal of 'craft as art'. It will identify the main source of the change in ideals as the organised international crafts network centred particularly in the United States, and will discuss the

ways in which some practitioners sought to pursue art ideals, in the context of changing values in the art world itself.

Chapter 4: Finding a place: education, money and the marketplace, 1970s
This chapter will survey the responses of educational institutions, funding bodies and the marketplace to the wide range of the crafts movement's ideals and activities in the 1970s, and to the public support it enjoyed. It will show that the crafts were supported as a separate valid force, but that this support occurred within the expectations and constraints of the art and design worlds of which the movement sought to be part. The crafts movement's particular pursuit of art ideals was acknowledged and even fostered by the infrastructure of the visual arts, but 'art-craft' practice was rarely accepted by the art world.

Chapter 5: Finding a voice: questioning art ideals, 1980s and 1990s
This chapter will discuss some of the factors, in a different social and political climate, that prompted a number of crafts practitioners and writers to begin to question their dependence on the values and structures of the art world. It will consider the moves to revalue traditional ideals and affiliations through the observations of contemporary cultural theory, through new interpretations of an artist's role, and through the changes in priorities of education, funding and the marketplace. It will also document some of the ways practitioners made changes to the ways in which they worked in response to a broader view of how their work might be considered and valued.

Chapter 6: Conclusions
This chapter will review a number of themes within the thesis, regarding the character and effect of the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals. It will summarise the nature of the postwar crafts revival as the contemporary crafts movement, within the context of a social history of the relationships between art, craft, design and industry. It will then look at two particular issues that provoked craftspeople to be interested in art ideals: the development of the perception of the artist as an individual; and the way our society has constructed hierarchies of value around the different practices of art and the crafts as they have been distinguished through certain media, forms and functions. Finally, it will survey some comments on the future of crafts practice.

Plate 3: Gerry Wedd
(see page 183) *Love Trophy 1*, terracotta urn thrown by Mark Heidenreich, decorated by Gerry Wedd with coloured slips and applied decoration, made in Adelaide in 1993. (183 x 54cm)

Gerry Wedd (b.1957) makes jewellery as well as ceramics, and he designs textiles for the surf fashion label, Mambo, using themes that combine high and popular culture. His *Love Trophies* were designed as funerary urns for 'romantic love', based on ancient Greek red and black wares, whose narratives 'ensure that myths remain intact'. The reverse of the urn shows a lighthouse with a stream of light in the shape of a tie: 'a bit of a joke about the phallocentricity of public monuments as well as being a well-worn symbol of hope'. The cartoons are 'garlanded with roses, thorns and skulls in a kind of Mexican melodrama style' with Shakespeare's words 'Of his bones were coral made...' and the popular song *Song to the Siren*. Interview, Gerry Wedd 1993.

Chapter 1:
Context of research: conflicting philosophies

This chapter will provide examples of the changing philosophies of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia in its shift from 'traditional' values in the 1950s towards art - and design - ideals from the 1960s. It will contrast those views with recent critical responses to some of the contemporary craftwork that has resulted from these ideals, and identify the issues raised as the subject of the thesis, to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

It will also summarise the current context for research and writing on this subject, and raise as a matter of concern the inadequate inclusion of decorative arts histories in art history/theory courses.

The pursuit of art ideals

Checking the field

In the immediate post-war years there was very little writing on the crafts at all. Some of the key publications were magazines like *Australian Home Beautiful* and *Australian Women's Weekly* that offered articles on craftspeople, designers, architects and the popular taste of the time. These publications provide some of the most important records of people and their work and of the ways in which audiences viewed them. For example, writing about the ceramic work of Harold Hughan, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval and others in the *Australian Home Beautiful* in August 1953, the reporter perceptively observed that of the various potters visited, 'some of those hand-signed pieces you buy today may be the Royal Doulton and Wedgwood of Australia in another fifty years'. The *Australian Women's Weekly* documented the impact of modernist architects and designers through 'ideal homes' exhibitions, where handmade ceramics, furniture and textiles were often displayed in that context.[1] In the absence of arts pages in many newspapers until well into the 1970s, much of the reporting on crafts practice was included in the social pages where crafts exhibitions and those who had attended them, were discussed as interesting events.

The need for information, and the need to make contact with others, was behind the formation of the first specialist journals such as *Pottery in Australia* and the *Australian Handweaver and Spinner* from the 1950s. For the most part, writing in these publications provided necessary information about supplies, techniques and events. At a philosophical level, writing reflected a shared belief in crafts practice as a way of life that made strong links to the

[1]For example, like Allan Lowe's pots, the screenprinted textiles of Frances Burke Fabrics and Annan Fabrics and the furniture of Fred Ward in the 1940s and 1950s.

values of previous times and to contemporary societies that still practised traditional crafts as part of their cultural life.

Perhaps the most important of these influences on Australian writing came from England, through Bernard Leach's *A Potters Book* in 1940, summarising his synthesis of personal experience of Chinese, Japanese, English and European pottery that had led to his own practice and philosophy, along with detailed technical advice and information.[2] 'It should be made clear', he said, in his introductory chapter 'Towards a Standard':

> ...that the work of the individual potter or potter-artist, who performs all or nearly all the processes of production with his own hands, belongs to one aesthetic category, and the finished result of the operations of industrialised manufacture, or mass-production, to another quite different category. In the work of the potter-artist, who throws his own pots, there is a unity of design and execution, a co-operation of hand and undivided personality, for designer and craftsman are one, that has no counterpart in the designer for mass-production...

He clearly differentiated between 'the intuitive and humanistic' qualities of the hand-made, and the 'rational and abstract' characteristics of design for industrial manufacture, saying that 'each method has its own aesthetic significance', and that examples of both could be good or bad. Furthermore, although he claimed that 'as soon as the craftsman becomes individual and detached from his tradition he stands on the same footing as the artist', he also believed that the works made should serve a useful function as well as being beautiful: 'it is unfortunate that as a consequence of its divorce from life, the "applied" no less than the "fine" art of our time...suffers from excessive self-consciousness...a very different thing from the unconscious, inherent, personal and race character which has distinguished all the great periods of creative art.' [3] In the issue of individuality, Leach was, as later, were many of his followers, somewhat caught between East and West. His colleague and fellow-philosopher, Japanese intellectual, Soetsu Yanagi, advocated not only that pots be simple and unassuming, but also that their production be 'non-individualistic' in the tradition of anonymous folk-crafts.[4]

John Houston's collection of essays *Craft Classics since the* 1940s (1988) brought together an important anthology of similar and subsequent points of view by British writers. 'War-time scarcity and intensity', said Houston, 'promoted the postwar appetite for the arts and crafts as healing forces in the

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[2]Almost every potter who set up a studio, built a kiln, or prepared materials in Australia from the 1950s to the 1970s acknowledges Leach's writing, diagrams and notes as a guide. For example, West Australian potter, Eileen Keys, taught herself to throw pots from Leach's book, but found later, that, without demonstration as a guide, she was turning the wheel the wrong way.

[3]Bernard Leach *A Potters Book* (1940) Chapter 1

[4]Soetsu Yanagi's 're-invention' of this tradition has been challenged by a number of writers, most significantly by Yuko Kikuchi in 'The myth of Yanagi's originality: the formation of Mingei theory in its social and historical context' *Journal of Design History* 7/4 (1994)247

new world of peace. The "creative" crafts - the inventive, expressive works of the artist-craftsmen and women - benefited from the romantic glow of the fading traditional crafts.'[5] In Australia examples of related ideals can be found in journals such as *Pottery in Australia* from 1964, *Craft Australia* from 1971 and the few early publications like *Australian Pottery* by Kenneth Hood and Wanda Garnsey (1972).

Crafts 'criticism' from within the Australian crafts movement in the 1960s and into the 1970s usually took the form of description of objects and techniques, and of measurement of technical and aesthetic judgment based on agreed standards, such as the 'pour-test' for teapots and the 'inspect-the-back' test for textile works. Sometimes it offered a broad statement of agreed value that was accepted uncritically. For example, in a review of the new edition of Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yanagi's famous book *The Unknown Craftsman*, Peter Timms drew attention in 1991 to our unquestioning acceptance of shared truths a few decades ago, and pointed out the confident assumptions on which the book is built, where Yanagi takes 'highly abstract and subjective concepts such as "beauty", "freedom", "truth" and "feeling" and treats them as objective principles'.[6]

There were few exhibition catalogues or publications on Australian crafts until the mid-1970s, and the essays in those that were published generally provided a historical and descriptive background to the exhibition or a statement about a general working philosophy. Behind the continual call for 'critical' writing from this time was also a confusion with the practice of writing as a promotional activity. This kind of writing extolled not only the work that was produced, but also the values associated with a particular way of life, or 'lifestyle'. In 1973, for example, attention was drawn to the fact that ceramist Marea Gazzard used no cosmetics, and wore 'mostly foreign clothes' - Finnish, Indian, batik - and though not 'fashionable, she has the rarer quality of style.'[7]

When they did write about it, art critics treated contemporary studio crafts practice as a new activity that was compatible with the spirit of the time, but there was some confusion about how it should be identified. Some discussed exemplary functional work along with paintings and sculpture, often as 'art in its own right'. And while there was a move amongst some reviewers towards accepting non-functional craftworks as 'art', others insisted that, because function was necessary in the crafts, new work that followed the form of 'art-craft' could clearly not be considered art at all.

It seemed to be writers in architecture and design magazines, like architect Tom Heath who reviewed crafts exhibitions like the annual events at the Sturt workshops in Mittagong, and exhibitions at Sydney galleries, who were more

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[5]John Houston *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* (1988) 7
[6]Peter Timms 'Zen and Now' *Crafts NSW* Autumn 1991 13-15
[7]Patricia Thompson *Twelve Australian Craftsmen* (1973) 54

workshops in Mittagong, and exhibitions at Sydney galleries, who were more inclined to discuss crafts practice in terms of its broader material and cultural history. For example, in reviewing the ceramic works by visiting potter Takeichi Kawai at the Hungry Horse Art Gallery, and John Chappell and Les Blakebrough at the Macquarie Galleries in 1964, Heath drew on Oriental ceramic and architectural history, his research into earlier influences of these on the West, and his knowledge of technical innovation in relation to design philosophy and the importance of ceremony, in order to critically comment on and compare these groups of work.[8]Along these lines, also available in Australia in the 1960s were the British journal *Studio International*, which provided examples of Scandinavian, European and British design and some examples of studio crafts, and the later *Form +Function* from Finland. Australian art and design journals of the time included *Art and Australia, Architecture in Australia* and *Design Australia*.

From 1971 *Craft Australia*, the journal of the newly formed Crafts Council of Australia, established just before the British *Crafts* magazine was first published, provided the first national magazine for the crafts. It drew on the models of all these sources and combined many of the existing forms of documentation and opinion. The editorial in its first issue stated that it was:

> ...dedicated to the fostering of the highest standards in the crafts. It will carry news and photographs of Australian crafts and craftsmen, and will feature international craft events...Everywhere in Australia people are finding that they need to make things themselves, with their own hands. They and the objects they make are part of a spontaneous and international movement to find individual satisfaction and fulfilment, and to improve the quality of life.

Reflecting the aims of the Council itself, the journal aimed to 'stimulate and guide, to communicate and to inform, to educate and encourage all those...who strive towards higher standards in the crafts. The professional craftsman, the student, the therapist, the amateur and the creative user of leisure time can all meet on common ground in Craft Australia.'[9]

The start of the chase

The 'spontaneous and international movement', and crafts writing about it, had been especially influenced by the American journal *Craft Horizons*, established in the late 1940s and operating eventually, from 1959, as the magazine of the American Craftsmen's Council. *Craft Horizons* provided photographs and information of objects and events and was a key forum for philosophical ideas about the contemporary crafts, especially from 1964, through its international mail-out to members of the newly-formed World Crafts Council. It provided a rich resource from which to invite visitors to Australia in the 1970s and its editor, Rose Slivka, was also invited by the

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[8]Tom Heath 'Japanese Pottery and Australia' *Architecture in Australia* June 1964 89-91
[9]Joy Warren *Craft Australia* 1/1 mid 1971 1-2

Crafts Board to Australia in 1973 to advise on the development of crafts writing and crafts journals, and on publications policy.

Rose Slivka had close associations with American visual artists and critics and with art departments in American universities, and was well aware of the modernist art ideals of the time.[10] These included, in relation to the crafts movement, firstly, the idea of the 'inherent' aesthetic or autonomy of the craft object (the idea that an object existed on its own, outside its history, society or market) and secondly, its function as the personal expression of the maker as an individual (also outside a historical or market context). The idea of autonomous objects - with little function other than as the free expression of their makers - provided an argument for craftspeople to be perceived in the same way as painters and sculptors, and therefore receive similar status as individuals in the art world.

Rose Slivka's writing, supporting the ideals of both craft-as-art and of the crafts as an expression of traditional, community values, reflected the contradictions of the 'crafts revival' and the re-invention of craft traditions at the time, from the particular point of view of conditions in the United States. Here, in a wealthy, industrialised country, all crafts traditions could be freely drawn on because people were 'not unified by blood or national origin - everyone is from some place else', and its craftspeople had 'never produced for a ruling hierarchy.' The 'craftsman of the modern world', Slivka observed:

> ...has created an entirely unprecedented situation - a prolific and vigorous handcraft culture within the structure of industrial power. He is the paradoxical expression of an abundant society's resistance to the homogenising pressures exerted by mass production, and of its drive to humanize and individualize, accelerated and matured through the internationalizing forces of mass communication.[11]

In 1968 the World Crafts Council published *The Crafts of the Modern World*, a survey of the crafts of about seventy countries with an introduction by Rose Slivka, who at that stage had been editor of *Craft Horizons* for about thirteen years. The purpose of the book, as identified in the preface by its benefactor, Aileen O. Webb, was to help celebrate the 'creative spirit of man, expressed in a thousand different ways, that pushes him forward and ...[that] makes craftsmanship so important in the present industrial sweep of our society...'.[12] In discussing the eclectic freedom of contemporary crafts opportunities, Slivka also referred to the romantic ideology of nineteenth century utopian

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[10]See Chapter 2. Modernism was the term for a series of art movements from the late 19th century that broke away from historical and romantic themes and styles, in favour of subjects of the present and the everyday; artists wanted to be 'avant-garde', and leave tradition behind. They drew on a wide range of other sources for their ideas, and broke accepted 'rules'. Late Modernism focused on a formalist view of reducing works to their essential qualities of form, colour and composition.

[11] Rose Slivka *The Crafts of the Modern World* (1968) 12-15

[12]Aileen O. Webb in Rose Slivka (1968) ibid 10-11

communities and showed a conscious acknowledgement to the social values of the traditional crafts practised in third world countries. She identified the ways in which makers drew on their own histories and the histories of the media in which they worked in order to make contemporary meanings, and identified the changing role of craftspeople in new social and cultural contexts. 'In his struggle to make ethical connections with his object,' she said:

> ...the craftsman of our time is making new demands on his knowledge, cultural sources, sensibilities, and experience. He is trying to create not necessarily new objects but new attitudes towards objects, to reinvest the object with its original intrinsic reality, value, power.[13]

Slivka's acknowledgement of historical precedents and values was at odds with avant-garde notions of Modernism in the visual arts in the 1960s. However, her friends included Harold Rosenberg (who had championed Abstract Expressionism), and she was well-acquainted with critics like Clement Greenberg who now advocated the 'autonomy' of an art work and its reduction to essential formalist qualities. She therefore tended to express her conclusions within the language and values of the New York art world of the time - using patriarchal terminology as everyone did at that time. In writing about 'the persistent object that demands to be made', she provided expression for arguments that have been used consistently by makers and writers since that time. 'The contemporary craftsman', she said, 'is less directly designing for function...as he is obsessed by the nature of his materials, the interaction of the materials and himself, and the degree to which he can reach object-ness.' This language, now in the form of terms like 'my work speaks for itself', and 'this is my personal art', has remained, for many, part of uncritical popular belief in the crafts since that time.

Rose Slivka's concerns to identify craft objects as independent artworks with an equal status to the fine arts were shared with many other craftspeople at the time. Writing in 1963, Nicholas Vergette, a British potter who had worked in the United States, similarly discussed the pleasure of working with his materials, in language that reinforced the autonomy of the artist as someone who did not now necessarily consider an audience: 'gradually the concept becomes subordinated to the evidence of physical sensations where one's intuitions and animal perceptions take over,' he said:

> I do not believe any other considerations are important. The state of being, the state of mind is the end itself. Art is the end itself. It is an exalted state of being in which any other consideration, such as function, social significance, historical precedent, and traditional values are irrelevant and inhibiting. [14]

This was a significant shift for the crafts: away from social function and purpose, and towards personal expression. It was quite different from Bernard Leach's meaning of 'intuitive' as both a way of working instinctively from a

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[13]Rose Slivka ibid 12-13

[14]Nicholas Vergette *Pottery in Australia* 2/2 1963 26

sound knowledge of materials, forms and functional histories towards making a useful object; and as a way of assessing a work through its 'mood' or 'nature' according to that knowledge: 'Judgement in art cannot be other than intuitive and founded on sense experience', he had said in 1940, '...no process of reasoning can be a substitute for or widen the range of our intuitive knowledge'.[15]

Running with hares and hounds

While serial production was a large part of the life and work of the craftspeople of the 1960s and 1970s, practitioners tended to make a distinction between 'bread-and-butter' lines and their 'personal work', 'conceptual pieces' or 'exhibition work'. To cater for the new attitudes to the crafts from the late 1960s, new words appeared in the crafts world, such as 'conceptual', 'non-functional', 'one-off' and 'wall hanging,' while extended identifications such as 'artist-craftsman', 'artist-potter' and 'textile-artist' were introduced.

Some of the developments caused considerable confusion in both the crafts and art worlds. For example, critical response, by leading art writers of the day, to the 1973 Clay + Fibre exhibition presented by ceramist Marea Gazzard and weaver Mona Hessing, who exhibited very large handbuilt vessel forms and 'off-loom' woven hangings at the National Gallery of Victoria, exemplifies the dilemma of identity between art, design and the crafts at that time. *(See Plate 4: following page)*

Patrick McCaughey described Gazzard and Hessing as superstars of Australian craft, who 'explode the familiar perimeters of the crafts...they declare a new imaginative status for their objects...the exhibition is splendid, if for no other reason that it should unsettle and mystify the categorisers and the puritans.' Alan McCulloch added:

> The suicidal trend in painting and sculpture has provided an excellent opportunity for a takeover of art by the crafts...The former humble cottage crafts have swiftly occupied the abandoned fields creating new art forms for themselves and a new status...the inventiveness and command of scale and the energetic and imaginative use of materials by these two fine artists should be a warning as well as an object lesson to all sculptors.

However, the more sceptical Donald Brook asked:

> What is an idling craft to do? The popular modern answer, encouraged by the loosening-up of the concept of art, is that it shall become an art, and there are obvious - even crude - gestures in this direction...they are not craft in the simple and important sense of being useful things well-made, and neither are they art in the sense of belonging formally, historically or conceptually to a

[15]Bernard Leach *A Potters Book* (1940) Chapter 1

> coherent family...so...they are essentially conversation pieces for cultivated middleclass households.[16]

In jewellery, the language of the fine arts shifted the significance of the work from the satisfaction of the client to the intent of the maker, sometimes, along with the shifting ideals of art in the 1970s, as 'social comment'. Ralph Turner wrote from England in 1976 that:

> ...the jeweller's art should be a communicative one: his art is entirely mobile, its being comes from and is about the human body...real creative jewelry should be capable of drawing people closer together. This type of jewelry should not be worn as a status symbol, its intentions are not to draw attention to social position - indeed the contrary would apply - but rather to attempt to show the outside world the personality of the maker.

He claimed that jewellery had often been used merely for its sensual appeal, but that recent years had included 'intellectual content, thus raising the subject to a higher level'.[17]

But did the crafts, in fact, need the fine arts? From the start, not all practitioners were convinced about the dependence of the craft world on the 'fine' arts for status, or for its realistic future. In 1973, for example, furniture designer John Smith was saying:

> On the one hand we have the traditionalist craftsman producing hand-made utilitarian ware, hoping to bring the creative experience to all men, struggling to survive under the weight of competition from industry, and trying to breathe new life into a dead concept, that was mis-guided even in Morris' day. On the other hand we have the brave new superstars leaving behind utilitarian functionalism, and surging forth into the realm of art, using craft techniques to make "fine art" visual statements...Craft will not effectively reach the masses until it can offer another ingredient more recognisably lucrative to them than cultural benefit: that is, financial benefit.[18]

This in fact, had been Mrs Webb's conclusion in her published survey of world crafts in 1968, and she had seen a solution in the international promotion of awareness of universal crafts values through a wide range of crafts practice.

John Smith's proposed solution was through design, as a fully controlled production exercise, working to different markets. But not everyone in the crafts world was clear what 'design' was, and an early challenge came from controversial visiting writer Donald Willcox, also in 1973:

> There appears to be a consensus...that what Australian craftsmen most need right now...is a rush of information on the subject of design. The idea of

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[16]Patrick McCaughey *Age* 31 July 1973; Alan McCulloch *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 August 1973; Donald Brook *Nation Review* 2 Aug 1973

[17]Ralph Turner *Contemporary Jewelry, a Critical Assessment 1945-1975* catalogue (1976) 70, 72

[18]John Smith *Craft Australia* 3/2 Dec 1973/Jan 1974 15

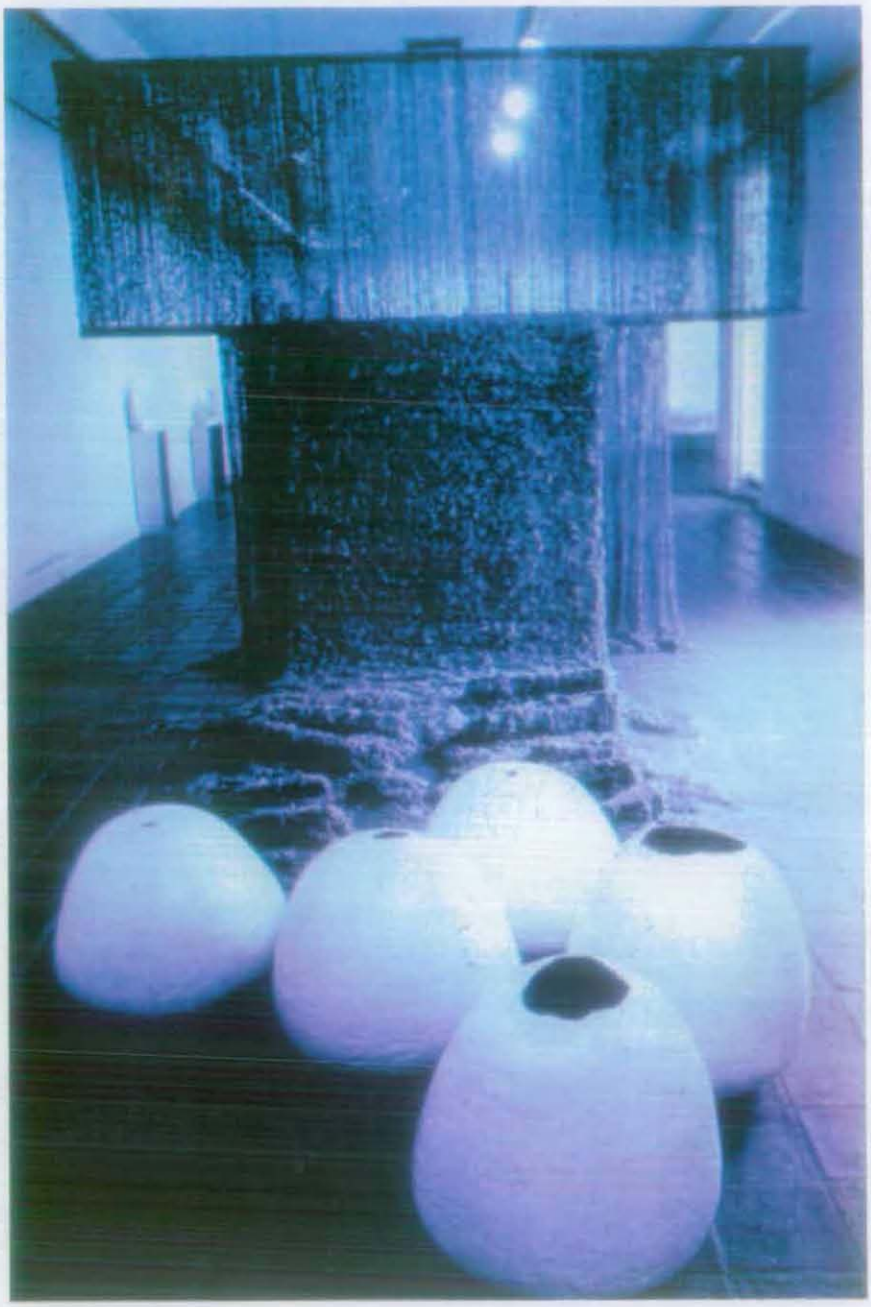

Plate 4: Marea Gazzard and Mona Hessing: *Clay + Fibre* 1973
(see page 18) In this exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Marea Gazzard (b.1928) exhibited large handbuilt vessel forms with Mona Hessing's (b.1933) woven hangings.

Responses exemplify the dilemma of identity between art, design and the crafts. For example, Alan McCulloch said: 'The suicidal trend in painting and sculpture has provided an excellent opportunity for a takeover of art by the crafts...The former humble cottage crafts have swiftly occupied the abandoned fields creating new art forms for themselves and a new status...the inventiveness and command of scale and the energetic and imaginative use of materials by these two fine artists should be a warning as well as an object lesson to all sculptors.' Alan McCulloch *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 August 1973.

> course being that information on the subject of design will somehow mysteriously or even magically upgrade the quality of Australian crafts.[19]

John Smith was, as were Marea Gazzard and Mona Hessing from their different perspective, committed to the ideals of the contemporary crafts movement. They were all active in the developing national and international organisational networks, and they were knowledgable of, and skilled in, the traditions and processes associated with the materials and forms they used. They were also well-acquainted with the current ideals and practices of design and industry, architecture and art and sought, as craftspeople with quite different personal practices, to have their work take its place as 'the crafts' equally within the spheres of art and design.

A view that provided an historical context to the ambiguity of the time came with the British Council's contemporary ceramics exhibition, Image and Idea, in 1980, selected by John Houston, who accompanied the exhibition to Australia. On the one hand, in line with the prevailing ideal of craft-as-individual-expression, and the specific selection of works for the exhibition, he said: 'The title is meant to suggest a conscious manipulation of material that is wholly at the service of the maker's imagination'. But in an essay that carefully traced the historical philosophical and practical separation of art from craft over six hundred years, he concluded that:

> ...our modern reactions to the words *craftsman* and *artist* are the result of innumerable struggles about status and expression, marketing and sensibility...[where] these precedents are usually and confusingly expressed as opinions because the historical process which informed them has been discounted or forgotten.' Freed by the modern disciplines of industrial and product design, the terms 'artist' and 'craftsman' were, he said, 'able to find a new independence. The longterm effects of the Arts and Crafts Revival have been to re-unite imagination and skill in the single person of each craftsman. It is still too early to tell whether our ideals and expectations about the newest generations of artists and craftsmen will draw them closer together. But as members of both groups receive an education that does offer them increasingly similar options...and an identical academic status, some identity of purpose may be expected.[20]

Losing the scent

Were Houston's predictions fulfilled? Were imagination and skill reunited in each maker? Did the artworld accepted 'art-craft' as 'art'? Did it need to?

The crafts, no matter what their intent, have barely been included in either Australian art or general Australian cultural histories. It has been difficult in recent years to maintain the crafts as a special teaching area in the secondary schools of the nineties, and financial cut-backs in universities have seen in

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[19]Donald Willcox *Victorian Craft News* 37 Feb 1974

[20]John Houston *Image and Idea, Contemporary Ceramics from Britain* catalogue (1980) 5-9

many institutions the recent amalgamation of specific practices into broad departments, for example, of two- and three-dimensional works. Here, ceramics, glass, textile and jewellery courses have been either closed or absorbed into sculpture or sometimes design departments, often with little regard for maintaining connections with their wider histories and traditions.

Craftworks have rarely been included in major art exhibitions. Many people in the art world are quite antagonistic towards the area: John Olsen, for example, in a review of Bernard Smith's *Death of the Artist as Hero* (where the crafts *were* mentioned) said, 'It is a policy of our present government to encourage the craft scene as a social palliative...what must be faced is the decline of aesthetic principle; nobody seems to know what excellence is any more.'[21] It appeared that in abandoning many of the previously commonly agreed strengths and qualities of working in the crafts, crafts practice had lost, in the eyes of contemporary audiences at least, its historical and social connections, and therefore its particular critical and intellectual framework.

At various times, the art world 'adopted' some aspect of the crafts and assimilated it into the history and practices of art. Thus, the early ceramic works of Australian artists Margaret Preston and Arthur Boyd are exhibited alongside their paintings in art galleries (as are the ceramic works of Picasso) where few other ceramic works are shown; and the painted, wooden *Red-Blue* chair by Dutch designer Gerrit Rietveld in 1918, while significant for its challenges to furniture design and construction, is discussed in fine arts courses in relation to, for example, constructivist painting rather than furniture. In writing about quilt making in 1973, Patricia Mainardi pointed out that while the art world could be forced to include token artists from other fields, it would 'never allow them to expand the definitions of art, but will include only those whose work can be used to rubber-stamp already established white male styles.' In this case, abstract pieced quilts made a century earlier were discussed in relation to contemporary formalist painting. 'Because our female ancestors' pieced quilts bear a superficial resemblance to the work of contemporary formalist artists such as Stella, Noland and Newman,' she said, '...modern male curators and critics are now capable of "seeing" the art in them.' One critic, for example, had described abstract pieced quilts as strong, bold, vigorous and tough, with 'op effects', use of 'color field', and 'mirroring' contemporary painting trends; but dismissed applique quilts as pretty, decorative, beautiful and elegant. Mainardi argued that over four hundred years women had made every kind of art through their quilts - reflecting personal, religious and political ideas, as well as abstract and geometric forms.[22]

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[21]John Olsen in a review of Bernard Smith's *The Death of the Artist as Hero* (1988), *Weekend Australian* 27-28 February 1988

[22]Patricia Mainardi 'Quilts: the Great American Art' *The Feminist Art Journal* 2 1 Winter 1973, cited in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrad (ed) *Feminism and Art History:*

Similarly, the craft world 'adopted' visual artists using 'crafts' media in order to extend a public perception of the boundaries of what they were doing. Some examples include artist and designer Douglas Annand, who made large glass sculptures in Australia in the 1960s, and Magdalena Abakanowicz and Ewa Pachucka, Polish artists working with fibres to make large sculptural forms, in the 1970s. Sometimes, as with Jeff Koons in the United States in the 1990s, who employed artisans to make very large 'kitsch' painted porcelain works, they resented the incursion of artists into 'their territory', because they did not possess the skills and understandings of the materials and processes required to make their work.

Art ideals continue to be reinforced as an ideal for the crafts in a range of quite diverse publications. Robert Atkins's *Art Speak: a Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements and Buzzwords* (1990), for example, is typical of a number of art dictionaries that include the crafts only through terms like 'artists furniture' and 'ceramic sculpture' - terms that refer to art in their intent. And in *Sight Lines*, her 1992 book on Australian women's art and feminist perspectives, Sandy Kirby devotes a whole chapter to the crafts - but only refers to, and illustrates, works that look like art and address what she has selected as feminist art concerns. In both cases, other crafts practices and histories are excluded from the 'art' narrative; they are clearly not considered part of it.

Questioning the catch

In the end, for many craftspeople, the pursuit of art ideals did not seem to provide what had been expected. Tim Jacobs observed at the fourth National Ceramics Conference in 1985:

> In the face of so much activity, so much growth over the last 15 years, there is still a dearth of analytical debate. The activity even in its broadest terms, continues to fail to attract any significant intellectual attention on any level - aesthetic, sociological, political, economic, psychological or philosophical. Questions like "what are we making?" or "why are we making?" always finish up back in the too-hard basket. Without the kind of rigorous critical framework developed for music, theatre, literature and other forms of visual arts, this kind of object-making will always remain peripheral to the culture.[23]

However, there had been a start. From the early 1980s crafts practitioners and writers in Australia began to question more seriously the values of the fine arts in relation to the crafts, particularly those of the 1970s that had denied so much of what had previously been important to the crafts. The questions raised by exposing hegemonies in the visual arts in the cultural theory courses of the 1980s brought to a head some of the conflicting ideals of the crafts in

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Questioning the Litany (1982) 343,344. Mainardi referred to exhibitions at the Whitney Museum and the Smithsonian Institution, with catalogue essays by Jonathan Holstein.

[23]Tim Jacobs *Conference Report* Fourth National Ceramics Conference (1985)

relation to art, design, industry the marketplace and society. Craftspeople started to reassess their role and identity in relation to these changes, and started to seek better ways to locate crafts practice within its own production traditions (that included its connections with art and design, as well as its own specific histories) in the contemporary cultural world. The issues that were discussed offered crafts practice a theoretical and historical rationale for addressing its own histories and language, and practitioners (in Australia at least) became more self-questioning, whether working as artists, as traditional studio crafts practitioners, or as designers for production.

In 1981, for example, criticising what she called the overdrawn difference between art and tradition in textile production made by Jack Lenor Larsen and Mildred Constantine, long-term United States exponents of the 'Art Fabric', Jenny Zimmer pointed out that:

> ...freedom from the loom and tapestry tradition does not necessarily pre-suppose greater freedom to choose an aesthetic over a utilitarian mode...it can and has produced senseless woven monsters...the medium must be pushed to the limits of contemporary expression and fully involve itself with contemporary conceptual and visual problems.'[24]

In a subsequent article in *Sydney Review*, 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater', she argued for a need for proper analysis of form, function, ornament, style, media and techniques for practices where these aspects form part of their history. She was critical of those who denied these elements in their work and believed that reluctance to ascribe value to them was one of 'the most interesting aesthetic prejudices of our time'.[25]

In jewellery, changes in fashion and the art world from the 1970s started to bring about a 'democratisation' of jewellery making, and a questioning of the value of precious materials and the associated status of the owner or wearer of jewellery. By implication, this involved a reassessment of the roles of the maker and user in perpetuating status distinctions according to either material, and therefore investment, values. It also encouraged, as Ralph Turner has argued earlier, the making of jewellery as a personal, expressive form of 'wearable sculpture'. But in Brisbane, in 1981, jeweller Elena Gee criticised the ideal where much work in galleries was useless from the public's point of view. She urged that if jewellers wanted to sell they had to consider the public, that it was too easy to make self-indulgent work and blame the public for not buying, and that it need not necessarily mean compromising the basic idea behind design.[26]

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[24]Jenny Zimmer in *Wool and Beyond First Australian Fibre Conference* report Melbourne 1981 31

[25]Jenny Zimmer 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater' *Sydney Review* Oct 1990 10-11 reprinted in *SA Crafts* 4/1990

[26]Elena Gee JMGA (Jewellers &Metalsmith's Group of Australia) newsletter 3 1981 29

By 1987, in the United States, Glenn Gordon was also observing that while making furniture could be a melancholy exercise in economic futility, he was not convinced about seeking shelter from the situation by selling itself and the world, on the idea of its being art and an endangered rarity. The supposition that furniture was sculpture, produced, in his view, work that was generally unconvincing as art, and pretentious as furniture. 'The problem is,' he said:

> ...that while we are plunged into the romance and the art of it, the furniture in the showrooms of Knoll, Stendig, Thonet, Atelier International, Casina etc. is still for the most part better designed, visually and functionally...Most art furniture languishes in galleries like over-ripe fruit in a bowl, overdone and too anxiously "original"...art furniture at its best is breathtaking...At worst it hyperventilates with the most desperate novelty...but if you are only out shopping for the Emperor's new clothes, naturally there is never a problem - you can always get a perfect fit.[27]

In 1990, Caroline Miley was able to observe, in Melbourne:

> One of the most noticeable pieces of work in the Meat Market's recent Easter exhibition was a hessian mat of depressed aspect. A piece of old tarpaulin, complete with rings, had had several layers of hessian and canvas loosely tacked to it, and laced across with thin strings to form a rectangle...The whole object displayed none of the qualities of virtuoso craftsmanship traditionally admired in conventional craft objects, and was presumably intended as a statement of negation of the necessity for such qualities...Very well: but what did it replace them with? Addressing purely formal qualities without emphasising craft techniques perhaps? The composition was dull and obvious, the surface disgusting, the colours and textures uninteresting. Perhaps it was a conceptual piece? If so, the concept was also both obvious and dull, and limply imitated concerns extensively worked through in fine art during the 1960s. It wasn't a craft object, and as a piece of art it was a failure... It was however, a good example or recent prevalent tendencies in craft exhibitions for displaying pieces of pseudo-art hanging on the walls.[28]

Peter Dormer complained from the United Kingdom in 1988 that 'a combination of postmodernist excess and ambition to be seen as an artist has tempted many a contemporary craftsperson into some highly skilled work of exaggerated design, size and complexity and hugely inflated prices,' and blamed rich collectors for encouraging it.[29] And Susanne Frantz, from her own considerable curatorial experience of that market in the United States, explained to glass artists in Australia in 1991 her concerns about 'the confusion among glass people about the purpose of their work and what it means to be an artist...a confusion about what you make and why you make it...I expect a lot from art', she said, and pointed out that in her opinion only a microscopic, almost invisible group working in studio glass, were making it.

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[27]Glenn Gordon *American Crafts* 47/1 Feb/Mar 1987 20

[28]Caroline Miley *Craft Victoria* 20/203 June/July 1990

[29]Peter Dormer 'The ideal world of Vermeer's little lacemaker' in John Thackara *Design after Modernism* (1988) 142

Art, in her view, should be a matter of private investigation in order to maintain an integrity that did not make it a commodity. But art had been turned into careers and businesses, centred round 'art stars'. 'The most glaring ways this situation manifests itself,' she argued, in relation to contemporary glass practice, 'is in the mistaking of decorative objects for art'.

Frantz's point was that 'everyone working in studio glass has to face [the fact] that they are makers of luxury goods which can only be purchased by people with disposable income'. In her view craft making, design and decorative art making have their own integrity and are not corruptible by money because they are meant to be useful and to please a wide audience: they are made 'to work, to please and they are made to sell'. She blamed the confusion of identity, to a large extent, on the American education system (reinforced by the support of collectors), that had resulted in:

> ...thousands of hard-working people busily expressing themselves by making personal shrines, fetishes and tormented forms while all the while longing to be sculptors...[with a] smaller even more industrious group of highly skilled artisans who have found their niche in obsessive technique and innovative technology that they too believe constitutes art.[30]

Writing in 1990, Nola Anderson argued that the 'American' studio glass-blowing technology and philosophy that developed in the sixties and was imported to Australia in the seventies, had also imported its own historical narrative. She pointed out that in emphasising expressive individual 'art', it had effectively displaced, from a narrative of Australian glass history, the histories of previous Australian industrial and architectural glass practices, and influences from elsewhere in the world like Scandinavia.[31]

Similarly, it could also be argued that the ideals of American expressionist ceramic artists of the 1960s, like Peter Voulkos and Paul Soldner (who had combined expressionism with the Zen approach to ceramics of philosopher Soetsu Yanagi and potter Shoji Hamada, that they had experienced through potter Bernard Leach's visit to the United States with Hamada and Yanagi in 1952), had not only entered the language and aspirations of Australian studio potters, but also completed the undermining of existing semi-commercial pottery as a preferred direction.[32]

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[30]Susanne Frantz 'Internationalism in Glass: too much common ground', *Ausglass* magazine, post-conference edition 1991 73,74. Frantz was speaking from her experience as curator of 20th Century Glass, Corning Museum of Glass.

[31]Nola Anderson 'Glass Roots: essays on the narrative of Australian studio glass' *Crafts NSW*, four issues in 1991, reprinted in Noris Ioannou (ed) *Craft in Society, an Anthology of Perspectives* (1992). Anderson argues that the myth prevailed into the 1990s despite broader histories provided by, for example, Cedar Prest and Jenny Zimmer at the first national glass conference in 1979.

[32]Researcher Dorothy Johnston in NSW has identified at least 100 small semi-commercial potteries using semi-industrial processes, in Sydney alone in the 1940s and 1950s. These were ignored by the studio crafts movement, which did not favour semi-industrial

Anne Brennan was typical of many asking for a new way of thinking. 'In the light of Matthew Kangas' enthusiastic assurances that ceramic sculpture has now been received into the realms of Fine Art,' she said, in her review of the exhibition, American Figurative Ceramics, in Australia in 1990:

> ...the most obvious problem for ceramic sculpture is that a lot of its rhetoric stems from subversive strategies which have subsequently become conventions. Some [ceramic] artists appear not to have been able to make the leap from the burning deck in time, and as a result, their work suffers something of a credibility gap.[33]

Of the three strands of American ceramic practice he had identified as functional ware, art pottery and figurative ceramics, Kangas had claimed that the latter had become 'the single most important and successful "cross-over" medium for the entire American craft movement.' In his essay he carefully placed images of the works in the exhibition between photographic examples of historical ceramic figures and quotations by, or references to, famous European Realist, Surrealist and Expressionist artists. He had argued of the contemporary works that: 'Taking their rightful place in art galleries beside painters or bronze sculptors...they have been the joint beneficiaries of a twin heritage: crafts and the fine arts.'[34]

But as Brennan observed, while many works were successful, others were not. She suggested that Robert Arneson was one of the mature artists who had 'neither been able to find a new and relevant context for the language he has established, or alternatively been able to divest himself of it and create a new one.' Meanwhile, amongst the younger artists who were still working from and consolidating 'the technical agenda from their older colleagues, what seems to be missing from their work is a discourse about ceramics - not in a purely referential sense, but as a way of exploring the history and social connotations of the medium for new meanings. The worst thing is,' she concluded, 'that in some cases, the work seems to have little to do with sculpture, either'.[35]

Exposing the trap

The views of these writers represented a critical shift from an enthusiastic pursuit of art ideals. Why were they not responding positively to so much of what was presented as craft-as-art? And why were art critics themselves reluctant to approach crafts practice in their work?

In 1985, writing from Toronto, art critic John Bentley Mays explained his reasons for not writing about the crafts. 'A spectre haunts the crafts world of

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processes, and most closed by the late 1960s because of both a change in taste and the lifting of import restrictions.

[33]Anne Brennan *Broadsheet* 19 1 March 1990 12-13

[34]Matthew Kangas 'American Figurative Ceramics' *Perth Craft Triennial* catalogue (1989) 12

[35]Anne Brennan (1990) op cit

America,' he said, '...the spectre of art...For the most part it appears, artisans are inclined to think that such a blessing is a good thing.' They identify press coverage as '...an important step to validation, exposure and recognition, and they want it regularly.' However, he also pointed out that to his knowledge:

> ...American craft-as-art has never undergone critical pitched battles comparable to the ones painting and sculpture have endured in the last 100 years...Right from the postwar days, when it decided to hanker after art's prestige and language and high profile, craft-as-art has been smiled on by sunny days...But in a crafts community apparently bewitched by the prospect of certification as art, what power is protecting crafts from becoming merely the fiefdom of these forces, or of any art critic or curator, however reactionary, who will confer the validation artisans appear to want?

'The quest for certification', he went on, 'has undammed a sea of incredibly vulgar, imitative "clay art" and "fiber art" - a flow that continues to the present day, unchecked by a craft press that is too cozy with the people it should be criticizing, and far too enchanted with the goal of validation to say much about emperors and new clothes.' He hoped for a fresh appreciation of the work of the potter, weaver and jeweller:

> ...who must be exempted from everything I have said about the practitioners of craft-as-art. The quality of mercy in great pottery and weaving is much needed in a visual culture which, under the steady bombardment of television and advertising, has become hugely wordy, demanding and obsessive, and saturated with insatiable desires. The artisan's commitment to the physical stuff of his craft is his only hope for salvation in the brushfires of fashion and the artworld's endless poodle parade.

Mays suggested that art critics would never give the crafts, or craft-as-art, as he had experienced it, as much attention as they wanted, not because the area was necessarily inferior to art, but because they believed it was not art. Craftspeople, 'like novelists and composers and physicists, belong to other tribes of creative discourse, with peculiar languages, technical strategies, codes and histories.'[36] It seemed that, in his view at least, in pursuing art ideals, craftspeople had abandoned these important aspects of their own circumstances. However, for those who wanted equal status and validation, those aspects were clearly not able to compete with the powerful infrastructure underpinning art ideals.

What was the barrier to the provision of critical cultural histories that might be more inclusive of those 'other tribes' of parallel practices like the crafts? Were the crafts really too insignificant to be noticed or too boring to be considered? Were they still marginalised institutionally as the work of women artists had been, and therefore still capable of retrieval? Or had they tried too hard to be included as art and, as a consequence, lost a recognisable connection with other aspects of their histories? Where was the trap?

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[36]John Bentley Mays 'Comment' *American Craft* Oct/Nov 1985

By the late 1980s those who knew most about the wide histories of the crafts were usually practitioners themselves and practitioner-lecturers in crafts and design workshop/studios in art and design schools, but there were limitations to what they could provide to students as part of their teaching program. Those teaching in the core history and theory areas in art schools had generally come from university fine arts departments, where very little or no decorative arts history was offered, so they in turn were able to offer little in their own courses. There were important exceptions, where some art schools provided the same history/theory course for all students, and included crafts and design histories, as well as art history, in their programs. But in most cases, those teaching a broader program that included crafts and design histories were doing so because of a particular personal interest or experience; it was not part of their training at university.[37]

At this time there were probably fifteen curators of decorative arts, crafts and design in Australian art museums, some of whom wrote about contemporary crafts practice from time to time. About half were trained originally in art schools (not always as craftspeople), while the balance had initially studied in Australian universities in either fine arts history, history, or a related area such as archaeology or anthropology with an approach to their area through the notion of objects as 'material culture'. One or two curators held further degrees in decorative arts studies through overseas institutions.

The institutions in which they worked held different views of how their collections should be funded, displayed, published and discussed, of how the decorative arts collection should relate to other collections, and where the specific collections of studio crafts fitted in to the whole. Most decorative arts collections like those in art museums in Canberra, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane (which included works from the period of the contemporary crafts movement) were attached to fine arts collections; some like those in Hobart and Darwin remained in art galleries attached to natural history museums; while the decorative arts and design holdings in the Museum of Applied Arts and Science's Powerhouse Museum in Sydney were linked to both social history, and science and technology collections.[38] While the protagonists of the crafts movement tended to see the crafts as the subject of discrete collections (and indeed many regional galleries in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have collections that could be described as 'crafts' time-capsules),[39] curators were more likely to consider

[37] For example, Julie Ewington's interest in jewellery and textiles; Jenny Zimmer's interest in stained glass; Nola Anderson's interest in glass; Peter Timms's interest in ceramics; Geoffrey Edwards's interest in glass.

[38] In a few instances small collections were housed in adjacent natural and social history museums, for example, the collections of Linton metalwork in the Museum of Western Australia, and Queensland industrial ceramics in the Queensland Museum.

[39] Such as in Bath in England (archives of pioneer studio craftspeople); Paisley (ceramics) in Scotland; perhaps Wagga Wagga (glass) in Australia, and ceramics in some regional

'studio crafts' as part of a continuum of the decorative arts and design - whether hand or machine made - in the context of the other holdings in their collections.[40]

It was increasingly recognised, through museum studies research both in the museums themselves and in the museum studies courses that emerged in the late 1980s, that different juxtapositions and contexts condition the interpretation of objects.[41] Thus, it was seen as important, by those in the field, that there be specialist training in the history and theory of decorative arts and design offered alongside fine art history and theory and histories of material culture, and that these histories should draw on other disciplines in order to interpret them. By the mid-1990s there were increasing numbers of graduates from museum studies courses, but most focused on either fine art or design (if they came from fine arts courses) or social history (from history, archaeology and anthropology courses). Very few had found undergraduate opportunities in the decorative arts - or its sub-group, the contemporary studio crafts.

Most of those writing reviews, catalogue essays, histories and journal articles were similarly drawn from other areas. As art history-trained Julie Ewington observed at Artists Week in Adelaide in 1991: 'the only approach at the moment is a multi-disciplinary 'material culture' one'.[42] 'Craft is not monolithic', agreed Diana Wood Conroy, a weaver and art lecturer from a background in archaeology, in 1994: '[it is] not one philosophy but many, and its material histories are the histories of our civilization.'[43] In 1996, jeweller and writer Anne Brennan confirmed her similar view:

> I have become sensitive to the meanings inherent in process and object, and deeply suspicious of the dichotomisation of hand and mind which often accompanies attempts to discuss the processes. I [have] realised, too, that in the practice of some craftspeople dedicated to the notion of production, I was seeing some of the most interesting discourses emerging; discourses which were moving away from the 'experimental' visual arts model, and alluding to other cultural models, other histories, which also have relevance to craft practice.[44]

In the same year, writing in *American Ceramics*, Maria Porges lamented:

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gallery collections. Such collections are active for the duration of particular staff interest or funding opportunity.

[40]For a discussion of the crafts in relation to other collections, see Grace Cochrane, 'Keeping Content: Crafts histories and curatorship', in Sue Rowley (ed) *The Meaning of Making: Contemporary Responses to Craft* (1997); originally paper to Interventions conference, Wollongong (1992) part published in *Object* Spring 1992

[41]This topic is included in museum studies courses such as at Sydney University, Deakin University, James Cook University, University of New South Wales, University of Western Sydney. It has also been debated at annual conferences of the national organisation Museums Australia, and state museums conferences.

[42]Julie Ewington, comment from the floor, Artists Week, Adelaide 1990

[43]Diana Wood Conroy 'Curating Textiles: tradition as transgression' *Object* 4 1994/95 23

[44]Anne Brennan 'Symmetry' review *Object* 4 1994/95 10-12

> If I have any criticism [of the level of writing on ceramics] it's when writers emulate the worst, most pompous art-historical type of writing, or rely on a limited vocabulary of vaguely descriptive terms. If I see the word 'luscious" one more time I'll...I'll want to write an essay on what bad pornography and bad criticism have in common...a reliance on tired vocabulary to create a predictable outcome.[45]

The main stumbling block during this time appeared to be the lack of coverage given in the Australian university fine arts departments to the study of the history and theory that might be associated with any area other than what was understood as 'fine art'. A search made in 1990 through all the higher education handbooks to see what was offering in Australian university art history, fine art history or visual art history courses, showed that apart from art history/theory courses in art schools, and one applied arts history and five museum studies courses, art history or fine art history was offered in about ten universities.[46]

These courses emphasised the history of European art, with most, but not all, offering some aspects of Australian art history. There were some courses in American art and architecture; a few isolated courses in Asian and Pacific art; one in ethnography and one in archaeology. Almost without exception, studies in art history centred round painting, sculpture and architecture. Some separately identified photography, printmaking and film-studies. The two offering courses on design seemed to emphasise the development of industrial design in relation to advertising and mass-media, and, in fact, one of those courses wasn't operating at all. The term 'decorative arts' appeared twice: once in a course on colonial Australian art to 1880, and the other in a course on Greek art from 500-50 BC. Some elements like mosaics and stained glass windows occured in ancient architectural studies. The word 'crafts' appeared nowhere. Neither did the words jewellery, ceramics, metalwork, glass or textiles, although one course mentioned dress, in relation to European art history.

There were no recommended texts on the decorative arts (or the crafts), except one or two related to architecture or design theory. It was as if painting, sculpture and architecture were the only visual cultural activities that had ever occurred, because they were the only ones reinforced. Nor did there seem to be much encouragement through philosophical and sociological approaches to our material culture, for students in their search for topics for study in the decorative arts: this area did not seem to provide the opinion of people like

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[45]Maria Porges, cited in John Teschendorff 'Is there a Future for Clay' conference paper, 8th National Ceramics Conference, Canberra, 1996

[46]See Grace Cochrane, paper to Adelaide artist's week, 'Imperial Culture Centres: Closer to Home' *SA Crafts* 2/1990 4

Janet Wolff who were saying that the issues of omission were for sociological rather than aesthetic reasons.[47]

There were a few notable and isolated exceptions within universities, where lecturers in art history involved themselves in 'crafts' debate through arts journals, and encouraged postgraduate research on crafts or broader decorative arts and design topics. But the university 'art history' education system clearly perpetuated and compounded the problems of omission and marginalisation, because it was the graduates of these courses who generally became writers, critics, curators and historians and teachers in the broad arts and design field. So long as the Australian institutions with responsibility for developing courses in historical and theoretical studies in the arts left out significant areas of cultural practice, there could never be enough trained people to help effect a change in the art schools, the newspapers, the history books and the museums, and by implication and example through their products the whole public perception about what 'the arts' might be.

In choosing the 'Social Context of the Crafts: Theory and Practice in the Late 20th Century' as the topic for the World Crafts Council conference in Sydney in 1988, the Crafts Council of Australia hoped to air some of these issues. *Craft Australia* and the journals of the state Crafts Councils, particularly of Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, tried at various times to identify and include the sort of writing that might be needed, and a number of arts journals or newspapers, like *Artlink, Art Monthly Australia, Agenda, Broadsheet, Praxis M*, the *Adelaide Review* and the *Sydney Review* provided opportunity for debate. Now and again, conference reports provided some of the most provocative, albeit elusive, documentation of contemporary thought and opinion about such issues. In her report to the Visual Arts/Crafts Board on publications in 1988, Margriet Bonnin commented on the lack of such critical and theoretical writing for crafts practice, and the board made increased attempts from that time to stimulate writing projects.

By the mid-1990s there were signs that, even in the visual or fine arts, the dependence on (often literary) theory by the visual arts from the 1980s had tended to push aside 'art history'. In criticising art teaching in the 1990s, Pat Hoffie argued that: 'It is now possible for art students to complete three years of undergraduate study without any unified view of Western art history, and without a knowledge of any theory related to art practice.'[48] Peter Timms also argued for the need for art histories to be taught alongside theory. In 1996 he pointed out that the importance Western societies had placed on individualism had contributed to the devaluation of traditions as guiding principles in our lives: 'Ceremony, duty and respect do not sit very well with the idea of individual freedom and self-expression,' he said:

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[47]Janet Wolff, paper to World Crafts Council Conference, Sydney, 1988. See also Janet Wolff 'Social Context' *Crafts* Sept/Oct 1988 15 for her review of the WCC conference

[48]Pat Hoffie *Art Monthly Australia* May 1996 89 4-6

> The result is not an enriching dialectic about the fullness of the void, but a rather lazy acceptance that history doesn't matter...This is one of the reasons that connoisseurship has been so devalued and scholarly study of historical periods so marginalised. Hence tertiary art schools will have theory departments but no history departments and artists grow to maturity without any interest in the development of their own discipline.[49]

Thus, it appeared to remain the task of lecturers in some art schools, who were trying to cater for student practitioners, to try to find appropriate historical and theoretical material to inform crafts and design practices. By the mid-1990s postgraduate historical and theoretical studies in the crafts were still focused here, in studio-oriented history/theory courses, rather than in fine arts history departments. The theses and catalogue essays from both these students and their lecturers further contributed to a growing body of informed and influential writing. A number of craftspeople, already knowing the history of their own practice, also involved themselves in writing, and an equally small number of other writers applied themselves to useful cultural analysis of what was going on.

But, in comparison with, for example, the visual arts, literature and film, there was still only a handful of people who could bring crafts practice, with its own social, cultural, economic and technological background, into any significant, broad, inclusive, cultural, historical or theoretical debate.

Conclusion:

The contemporary crafts movement enthusiastically pursued art ideals from the late 1960s, strongly influenced by the postwar art world, especially that centred in the United States. However, in seeking validation by the art world, the movement's largely uncritical pursuit of art ideals alienated it from the visual arts, an area characterised by swift critical change.

The institutions that reinforce the hierarchies and values of the visual arts world, like university fine arts departments, have rarely included the crafts movement and crafts ideals in their cultural histories. The crafts have been mostly assimilated into the history of art where artists or designers have used 'crafts' materials or forms, or where crafts processes and functions have been seen to have an affinity with a political position in the fine arts, such as by the women's art movement and the community arts movement.

From the early 1980s some practitioners and writers started to question the pursuit of art ideals and tried to recover a wider knowledge and acceptance of broader crafts histories and values. But the hierarchical distinctions in the visual arts, and the desire of some craftspeople to overcome them, was not a recent phenomenon that could be easily changed.

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[49]Peter Timms 'The Use and Abuse of Traditons' in Jenny Zimmer (ed) *Contemporary Craft Review* (1996) 15 -18

The source of the distinctions between the fine arts, crafts and design, and of the crafts movement's aspirations towards the status of the fine arts in the 1970s, can be found in the changing relationships between art, craft, design, industry and society over many centuries. Especially influential were the varied responses to industrialisation in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This background will be discussed in Chapter 2.

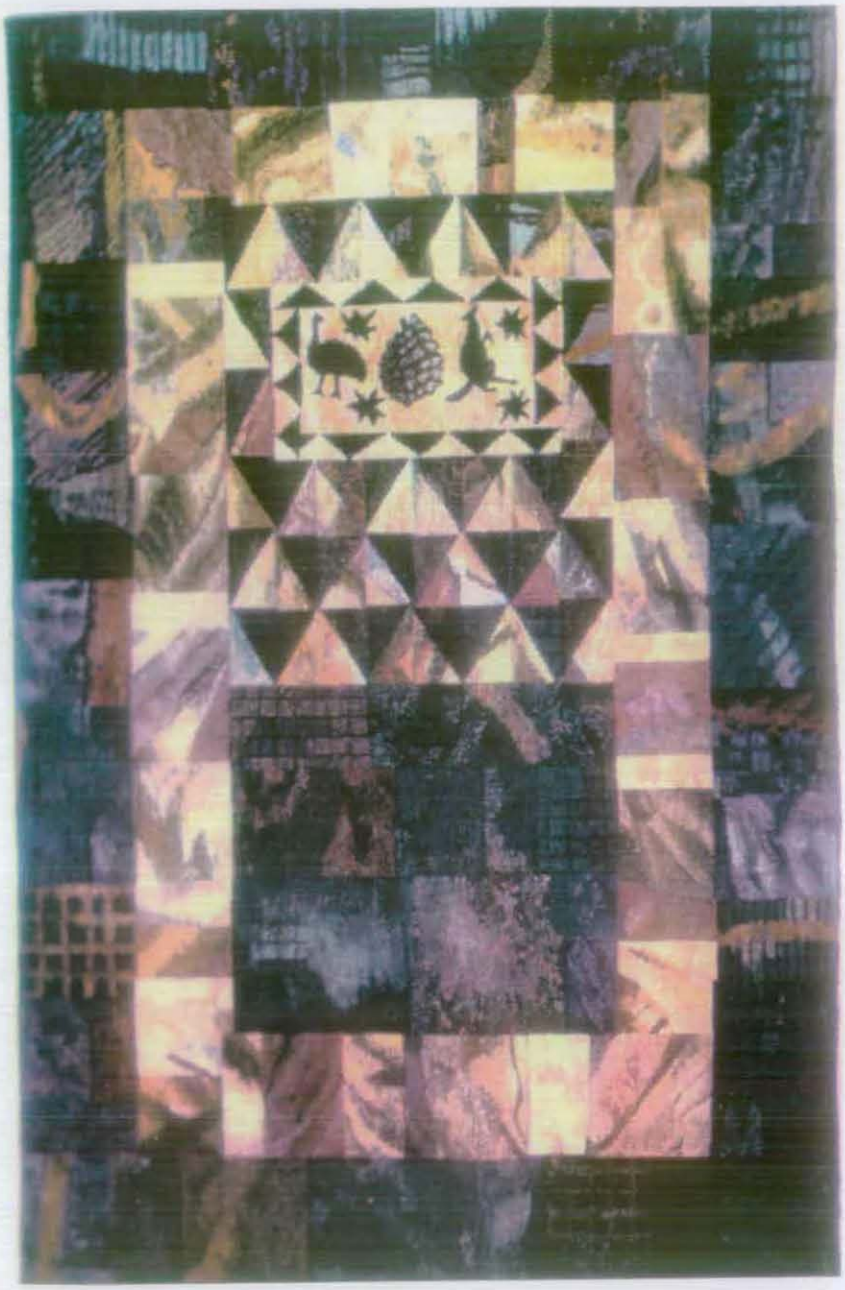
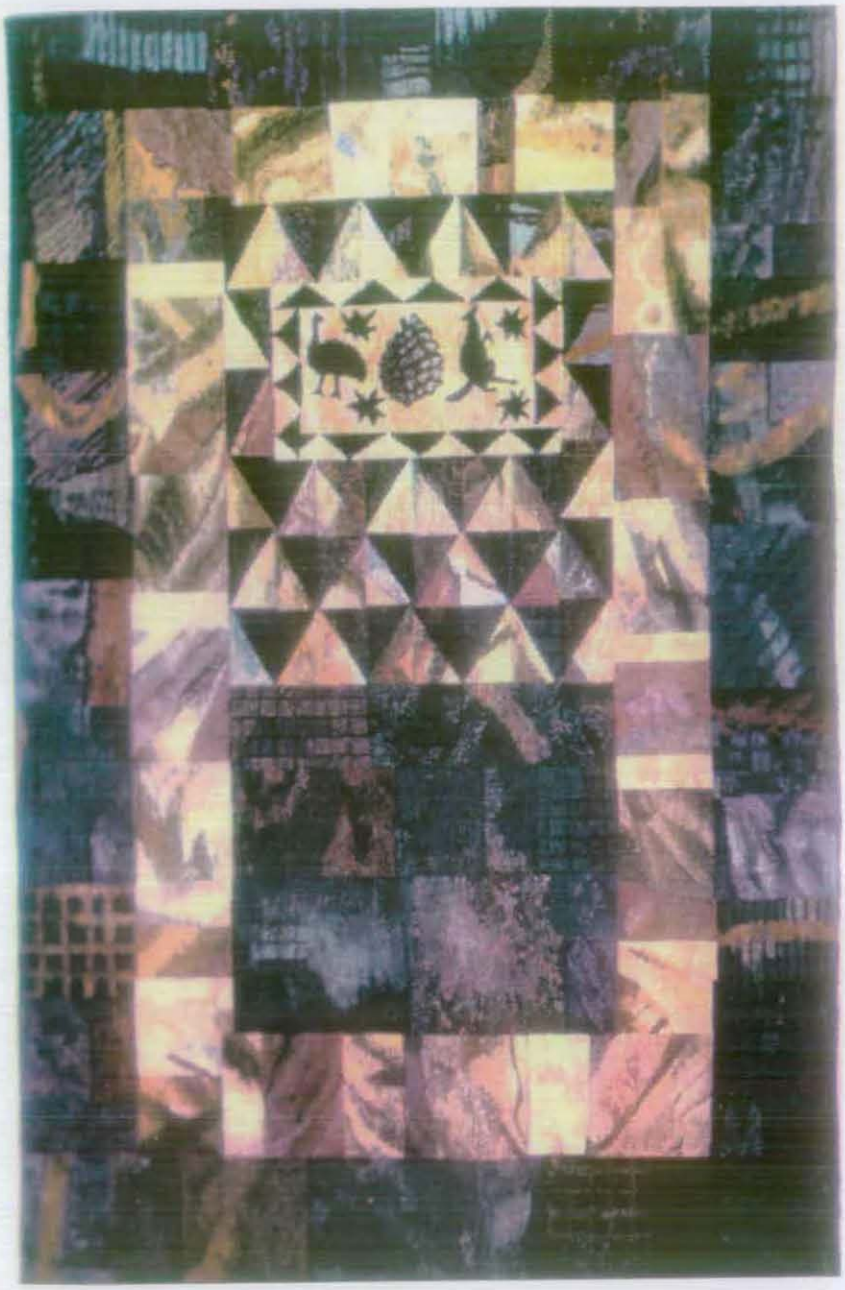


Plate 5: Valerie Kirk

(see page 154) Tapestry, *Pineforest Quilt - Applied, Used, Discarded,* woven in mixed yarns on a cotton weft in Canberra in 1994. (150 x 90cm)

'The image in the tapestry...has been developed from drawings of the pineforest plantations and areas of native vegetation...I am intrigued by the farming/forestry/building creeping up the hillsides around Canberra. It gives a sense of being part of ongoing pioneering... processes...The overall format is that of a quilt, playing on the idea of the quilt/forest as a covering and looking at women in the domestic environment reshaping fabrics to provide a cover.' Valerie Kirk, artist's statement 1994.

This tapestry brings together a collection of traditions. Trained in Scotland, Valerie Kirk (b1957) settled in Australia in 1987. Remembering a family quilt of Scottish tweed suiting samples, Kirk has integrated into her environmental drawings, motifs from two early quilts in the Powerhouse Museum's collection. The *Medallion Quilt*, (here with a pine-cone replacing the unusual central shield), was made by Mrs 'Grannie' Brown, from Bowning, NSW in about 1895. The other, with its pattern of triangles, is a 'Wagga' quilt of woollen suiting samples made by Caroline West, in Trundle, NSW in about 1930.



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Chapter 2:
Between 'beautiful and useful' and 'form follows function': art, craft and design ideals to the 1960s

This chapter will briefly identify the history of the separation of 'art' from 'craft', then consider the background of the early ideals of the contemporary crafts movement. The movement's sources will be found in the educational and cultural philosophies of both the Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century (as beautiful and useful) and the development of Modernism (as form follows function) in the early 20th century. In the context of post-war responses to Modernism, the chapter will look particularly at the development of crafts communities and specialist crafts groups that were an expression of a shared philosophy and identity where most were interested in making beautiful and useful utilitarian items in the context of a supportive community.

Introduction

The history of the philosophical separation of 'art' from 'craft' has had a strong bearing on the values of post-war crafts practitioners and on what was to emerge as an organised international crafts movement in the 1960s.

This history includes changes over time in the status and value placed on the 'fine' and 'useful' arts and the people who made them; changing relationships between industry and art, the crafts and design; and changing views on the role of the individual in society. The contemporary identity of the crafts has also been affected by the contradictions that occur in reviving traditions while seeking contemporaneity and modernity.

A fundamental issue is the intellectual separation (in Western art) between what we know as the high or fine arts and the useful or decorative arts, including the crafts, and the associated change in their relative status and value.[50] The split between art and craft is commonly acknowledged to have occurred during the Renaissance in the sixteenth century. Before that time artistic work was carried out in much the same way as any other work: by skilled artisans working collectively through guild systems with masters and apprentices. Art tended to be the expression of shared cultural beliefs and crafts guilds ensured among other things, the maintenance of standards and the passing on of traditions, including those of painting and sculpture.

[50]The word 'art' in the West, for example, originally meant skill, and was not necessarily associated with intellectual ideas; while 'craft' originally meant power, strength and force, and even magic, before it came to mean a 'calling requiring special skill and knowledge'. Refer *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

Arnold Hauser contends that from as early as the seventh century B.C. poets had demanded to be recognised as the creators of their works, and thus gained a competitive status over other artists. The courts of 'commercial princes' became the cultural centres of the time, and collecting points for works that, contrary to earlier purposes, now had 'absolutely no magic or healing function to fulfill'.[51] The separation between art and craft came about largely as a result of efforts to redress this earlier distinction: that between the liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, and extending to include history, poetry, comedy, tragedy and dancing) and the mechanical arts (meaning any contrivance such as painting, sculpture and the crafts). The term 'liberal', said John Houston, 'suggested freedom in the special sense of independence. This freedom, to study for its own sake, implied the leisure to do so. The liberal arts were the preserve of those who ruled. In that sense they overshadowed those arts which depended on manual labour and commerce.'[52]

The term 'artist' was originally used to identify a student of the liberal arts, and only later, the mechanical arts, and remained largely a description for a skilled individual. From the fifteenth century in Italy, a review of classical learning brought scholars, architects and artists further together with rich patrons who were interested in works of allegory and illusion, so 'those who could meet the intellectual demands of the new relationship... enjoyed an enormous advance in their personal prestige'.[53] The courts, the church and wealthy merchants, who were competing for artists to supply them with artworks and buildings that would give them greater status and distinction, provided a working framework in which artists had an increasing measure of intellectual freedom. The artists who were supported by this patronage, like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarotti in the sixteenth century, achieved a status as people who worked with their heads, or intellect, that separated them from those who worked with their hands. Art began to be seen as the expression of independent personalities when these artists began to break from merely inheriting and passing on skills and traditions, started to carry out their own mathematical and anatomical research and were individually identified by their own interpretations of themes. As artists worked less on commissions for a particular patron, so the notion of the individuality of the artist became established. Successful art was perceived to be the result of inborn human genius.[54]

Arnold Hauser points out that up until this time the question of the artist's social status was of little consequence. Most artists came from the lower classes, and although their skills were highly valued, they had to adapt their work to the needs of the client. 'From the beginning of the Renaissance,' he

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[51]Arnold Hauser *The Sociology of Art* (1982) 257-8

[52]John Houston *Image and Idea: a view of Contemporary Ceramics in Britain* (1980) 6

[53]Houston op cit (1980) 6

[54]See, for example E H Gombrich *The Story of Art* (1972) 218-219

says, 'artists shared the status of craftsmen, but they did not regard it as an honorable one. They begin to join together in new and special sorts of association and gradually transfer the functions of the guilds to the academies which are beginning to develop'.[55]

John Houston observes that our current concept of art became institutionalised with the foundation of the French Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648, where eventually, director Charles Lebrun 'directed several hundred craftsmen without having shared their training. Their skills were at his disposal, but only as a means to an end, for these men were no longer artists or craftsmen. Artisan was the new term.'[56] By the eighteenth century, with the increasing division of labour through industrialisation,[57] 'fine art' became further separated from 'craft', and the 'fine artist' separated from society. Modern usage of the term 'artist', where the objective is 'mainly to gratify aesthetic emotions' is documented from 1853.[58]

Many of our contemporary perceptions of the visual arts, crafts, design and industry have their immediate roots in the development of this history into eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophical beliefs on the nature of art and aesthetics, the changing roles of artists and artisans as an effect of the Industrial Revolution of that time and the expectations of both the fine and decorative arts by the new middle class. Almost without exception, as Raymond Williams points out in his analysis of key words in current usage, twentieth century cultural theories of art and aesthetics and the language used to explain them, are linked with developing notions of individuality, personality and uniqueness, which were largely associated with the rise of the nineteenth century merchant middle class and its cultural aspirations of entrepreneurship and ownership.[59]

For example, one of the results of the Industrial Revolution (with the division of labour in many trades, an interest in standardising products, and an increasing attention to technology and mechanical systems) was a decline in the need for and value of hand skills, and a loss of feeling for materials. As well, the division of labour further removed the makers from the designers, who were by now more often industrial manufacturers.[60] Penny Sparke points out how eighteenth century designers and entrepreneurs like furniture designer Thomas Chippendale, pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood, and metal

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[55]Arnold Hauser op cit (1982) 143

[56]John Houston op cit (1980) 7

[57]Edward Lucie-Smith *The Story of Craft: the Craftsman's Role in Society* (1981) chapters 1, 9. Lucie-Smith points out that there have been many earlier examples of division of labour, and industrial processes, but that these had still been based on a hand-made product.

[58]Refer Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, in 'God's Little Artist', in *Old Mistresses* (1981) 82, quoting the Oxford English Dictionary, which cites F.D. Maurice in *Prophets and Kings* (1853) as the source.

[59]Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1985) 42

[60]See Edward Lucie-Smith op cit (1981) Chapter 9

manufacturer Thomas Boulton were all pioneers in the production of consumer goods for a growing middle class in Britain.[61] Their factories not only separated the artist/designer from the maker of objects, but also separated the production of goods from their markets. This was in marked contrast to the previous system of home or village crafts production for largely local markets. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock identify this time as co-incidental with the strengthening of the parallel identification of women with 'craft' and men with 'art', as part of the social definition of women as dependent, virtuous - and domestic.[62]

The crafts as they developed in Australia in the nineteenth century, reflected these histories. They were practised by both men and women in the 'making-do' tradition, through necessity, as they were far from familiar suppliers; and by skilled local tradesmen, such as silversmiths and furniture makers, using imported styles, often adapted to include Australian motifs and to accommodate local materials. While Australia was still very dependent on the factories of England for its supply of domestic and industrial wares, there were some local industries such as industrial potteries and glassworks. As well, what was understood by and expected of knowledge, science, art and industry in the nineteenth century was reflected in the ways in which schools, museums and galleries were organised in Britain and established in Australia, and the ways in which 'knowledge' was taught and classified.[63]

Throughout design history from this time, which includes the story of 'crafts revivals' as a resistance to industrial development, Penny Sparke identifies a number of continuing sub-themes, 'among them the changing nature of the designer, the vexed question of mass culture and taste, developments in technology, and the influence of design reform'.[64]

The influence of efforts to redress social and industrial divisions in Britain and the United States also reached Australia by the early twentieth century through various strands of democratic and utopian philosophy. The immediate precursors of related design influence, not only on Australians at this time, but also on what was to be the contemporary crafts movement fifty years later, were the ideals of the nineteenth century British design reformers, the Arts and Crafts movement from the 1880s and the development of early twentieth century Modernism in art and architecture.

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[61]Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987) 11

[62]Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock ibid (1981) 82-83

[63]See Richard White *Inventing Australia* (1981) 59-62, for his observations on the development of cultural institutions, from British models, that were set up to provide a moral education for a politically democratic, culturally materialistic society that was following in the footsteps of the United States.

[64]Penny Sparke op cit (1987) 8

A precursor of ideals: the Arts and Crafts movement

Design reform

From 1851, following the first Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, in London, large exhibitions of the products of art and industry that combined the use of natural resources with the application of industrial skill and design, became very popular, both in the United Kingdom and its many colonial outposts (such as in Sydney in 1879 and Melbourne in 1880), and in Europe and North America. But by the mid-nineteenth century the British system of manufacturing, from which Australia derived its model for education and aesthetic taste, had come under fire from a number of sources.

One source of criticism was the work of liberal reformers,[65] who, believing in education and the potential of human nature to do good, embarked on programs of political and social reform to change working conditions. Their programs took practical effect in some of the 'new' countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and America, which were considered to be social laboratories, even before they did in Britain.[66] The development of socialist thought centred around Karl Marx, who moved from France to England in 1849, was also influential at this time.[67] His perception of a 'fundamental crisis in modern society' and his ideas for resolving it, provided ideas that have since influenced almost all areas of Western intellectual life.[68]

At the same time, rapid developments in industry had resulted in what architect Augustus Pugin described as 'a confused jumble of styles and symbols borrowed from all ages and periods'.[69] 'There was a consensus,' said Penny Sparke, 'among those individuals who sought to reform the design standards of the mid-nineteenth century that, as a result of both the increased level of production and the emergence of new classes of consumers, the taste of the nation as a whole was in a state of decline.'[70] Neil McKendrick also noted of this time that: 'Novelty, new fangledness, must be the matters of excitement for an aggressive commercial and capitalist world: ever increasing profit is not made in a world of traditional crafts and stable fashions.'[71]

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[65]Reformers included Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill.

[66]Richard White op cit (1981) 50, 86

[67]Marx believed that human beings create their world through labour, but that in a class society they are alienated by 'the division of labour, private property and the capitalist mode of production in which the worker loses both the product of his labour and his sense of his own productivity, following the expropriation of both by capital'. Raymond Williams op cit (1985) 35

[68]See Eugene Kamenka in Malcolm Long (ed) *Marx and Beyond* (1973) 10

[69]A W N Pugin, cited in Lucie-Smith op cit (1981) 207

[70]Penny Sparke op cit (1987) 58

[71]Neil McKendrick, J Brewer and J H Plumb *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* 1983, cited in Penny Sparke op cit (1987) 13

People like Henry Cole, founder of Summerly's Art Manufactures in England in 1847,[72] were especially critical of what they saw as the shoddiness and lack of design in British manufactured goods, particularly those displayed in the first Great Exhibition of 1851. Cole believed the solution lay in education, and the programs he and his followers set up in schools were supported by a stream of books and magazines on design and decoration. It was in this framework that from 1864 the National Art Training School in South Kensington, London, later the Royal College of Art, organised its courses, which were to be of such influence on Australians. Gillian Naylor observes however, that in spite their reforming zeal, the education programs in the design schools became obsessed with decoration rather than form, established few valid links with industry and had little understanding of manufacturing processes, so they largely failed to achieve their aims.[73] Herbert Read, writing in the 1930s, described them as having moved in an 'unreal world of taste, divorced from any connection with the tools, the processes and the materials of manufacture'.[74]

Meanwhile, architect Augustus Pugin's solution in the 1830s and 1840s had been to seek to revive Gothic ideals, where he insisted not only on 'integrity of design, but also on integrity of construction'.[75] Historian Edward Lucie-Smith considers that these views placed Pugin at the parting of the ways between contemporary industrial design and the crafts movement as we know it today. Philosopher John Ruskin made his assessment of design reform ideals in the context of social concerns. Through his influential writing, from around the 1850s, Ruskin led the way in rejecting neoclassical or 'pagan' architecture and ornament and the deceit of using one material to represent another, and advocated that works should show that they had been made by human hand by showing the individuality of imperfection. Rather than reducing standards, he believed this would lead to a new aesthetic through celebrating the dignity of labour.

William Morris and his followers

The writings of Ruskin and the development of socialist thought, combined with the Pre-Raphaelite art movement which renewed an interest in medieval art as an alternative to the academies, all influenced designer William Morris. His ideals and example provided the stimulus for the Arts and Crafts movement, dozens of guilds and societies, and practices and philosophies that extend into the present day. Morris established 'the Firm' of Morris, Marshall, Faulkener and Co. in 1861, and its furniture, textiles, wallpaper, stained glass, metal and glassware, and tiles were commissioned extensively - by rich clients

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[72]Henry Cole was also head of the Schools of Design in Britain for twenty-one years, and founder of what became the Victoria and Albert Museum.

[73] See an argument to this effect by Gillian Naylor *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (1971) 22

[74]Cited from unidentified source in Penny Sparke op cit (1987) 62

[75]Edward Lucie-Smith op cit (1981) 208

- throughout the next decades. The principles he espoused, as Caroline Miley summarised:

> ...included a reliance on manual and traditional methods of manufacture; a desire to express, rather than conceal, the construction of an object; faithfulness to the material of which an object is made; avoidance of meticulous finish for its own sake, and the use of appropriate motifs drawn from the natural world...The arts, crafts and architecture were complementary, and should be united wherever possible.[76]

Gillian Naylor further observes that 'the cardinal principle upon which all his theory rested centred round his conviction that the designer (or architect) must have a personal knowledge of the potentials and limitations of the materials he is working with if he is to produce work of any validity, and such an understanding of the process of design must be learned at first hand.'[77] From the late 1870s Morris started to write and lecture about his beliefs: 'Never forget the material you are working with', he said:

> ...and try always to use it for what it can do best: if you feel yourself hampered by the material in which you are working, instead of being helped by it, you have not so far learned your business...it is the pleasure of understanding the capabilities of the special material, und using them for suggesting (not imitating) natural beauty and incident, that gives the *raison d'être* for decorative art.[78]

A. H. Mackmurdo's Century Guild, formed in 1882, was a younger group that sought to 'render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but of the artist', and to 'restore building, decoration, glass painting, pottery, wood-carving and metal to their rightful place beside painting and sculpture'.[79] Mackmurdo was interested in new music and literature, the simplicity of Japanese aesthetics, popular at the time, and new systems of economic reform. A related influential development was designer C.R. Ashbee's co-operative Guild of Handicraft, which he established in a large house and retail premises in London in 1888. In 1902, when the lease expired, about 150 people transferred to Chipping Camden, where not only did Ashbee envisage that their wide range of crafts would still be practised, but that cultural and physical activities would also be provided for the people from the village.[80]

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[76]Caroline Miley *Beautiful and Useful, the Arts and Crafts Movement in Tasmania* (1986) 9

[77]Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 104

[78]William Morris *Arts and Crafts Essays* (1899, reprinted 1903) 38, cited in Naylor op cit (1971) 104

[79]Cited, unauthored, in Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 117

[80] The philosophy of this community was quite probably the model for Winifred West who, having established Frensham School at Mittagong in New South Wales in 1912, set up the Sturt workshops there along similar lines in 1941.

Of the various groups and guilds that formed as followers of the ideas of Ruskin and Morris, it was the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (1886)[81] that had the greatest influence in Britain, and in countries like Australia that had British connections, through what became known as the Arts and Crafts movement. Its effect was felt through its exhibitions, through the example of its products and philosophies in the magazine *Studio*, which was launched in 1893, and its influence in reforming art schools.

At the same time, the Aesthetic movement, that had grown out of the interests of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, 'existed simultaneously with the Arts and Crafts movement, and shared some of its reforming idealism.' However its theories were less social than aesthetic; its focus was on fine art and literature; it provided a model for a fashionable way of life for the new middle-class; and it sought 'to "aestheticise" the environment as a response to what it saw as declining standards of contemporary taste.'[82] By the time of the Great Exhibition of Art and Art Industry in Paris in 1878, Penny Sparke noted that:

> 'Art' had become a powerful incentive to sales in international markets, and it was generally accepted by the more successful practitioners in the semi-craft industries...that their products should be 'designed', and that consultants and specialists [like Morris's Firm, the Century Guild and the Arts and Crafts designers] should be used for this purpose.[83]

The terms 'art-pottery', 'art-glass' and 'art-metalwork' became characteristic of this time, and remained ideals in Australia throughout the early decades of the new century. In the ceramics industry, for example, artists were employed as designers and decorators in the manufacturing process. Henry Doulton worked with the Lambeth School of Art in London from 1871, and encouraged artists to decorate salt-glazed stoneware and later painted *faience* wares in the Doulton & Co. factory. At the same time, Doulton's commissioned their English painters to decorate wares with Australian wildflowers (and no doubt those from other countries), and Australian artists like Lulu Shorter to produce Australian designs for them. Artwares like these became a feature of ceramic industries, and the fashion for painting on ceramic wares spread to amateur china painters from the late 1800s, in Australia often associated with Arts and Crafts societies and Technical College courses.

'Art' therefore, was seen as something that could be associated with, or applied to, functional forms to give them, as 'artwares', a higher status and value.

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[81]The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, formed in 1886, was an offshoot of the Art-Workers Guild, and offered an alternative to the Royal Academy and the Institute of British Architects. The term Arts and Crafts was first used in connection with this society.

[82]Penny Sparke op cit (1987) 71

[83]Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 148

The individual and the machine

The Arts and Crafts movement marked a stage in the 'realization that technical progress does not necessarily coincide with the improvement of man's lot.'[84] But it also marked a stage in the development of both the ideal of the artist (craftsperson or designer) as an identified, creative individual, and an aesthetic based on the use of the machine.

When the National Art Training School in South Kensington became the Royal College of Art in 1896, with William Richard Lethaby setting up the school of design within it in 1901, teaching became more craft-workshop-based. It aimed more to produce resourceful people and thoughtful workmanship, than apply the 'rigid application of rule'.[85] But Peter Floud pointed out in a comparison of crafts practice in both 1893 (during the Arts and Crafts movement) and 1953 (the early years of the contemporary crafts movement) that the most unexpected fact to emerge was that, despite the valuing of craftsmanship, the identity of designer and craftsperson, so much an issue later, received little attention in 1893. He observed that it was teachers like Lethaby who 'by first stressing the didactic and therapeutic value of craftwork - paved the way for the present-day belief that craft products have a special value in that they express the individual personality of the maker'.[86]

The craft aesthetic, summarised Gillian Naylor, 'was concerned with fitness and propriety; it demanded that materials and function should determine the design solution', and drew largely on the shapes, forms and colours of nature. 'These assumptions concerning the nature of the design process,' she said:

> ...were fundamental to nineteenth-century design philosophy, as it developed in England, and they had been formulated long before the Arts and Crafts movement appropriated them and associated them with the especial virtues of handwork. In the early part of the [twentieth] century, however, when a general concern for design standards was first being expressed, such ideals were considered appropriate to both craft and machine production, and, in fact, little attempt was made to distinguish between the two.[87]

By 1905, designer Walter Crane was saying:

> The arts and crafts movement has been the best influence upon machine industry during the past ten years...while we have sought to develop handicraft beside it on sound and independent lines, we have succeeded in imparting something of the spirit of craftsmanship to the best kind of machine-work, bridging over the former gulf between machinery and tools, and quickening

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[84]Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 7

[85]Christopher Frayling *The Royal College of Art, 150 Years of Art and Design* (1987) 71

[86]Peter Floud 'The Crafts Then and Now', *The Studio* April 1953, in John Houston (ed) *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* (1988) 49-50

[87]Gillian Naylor ibid (1971) 147

> machine industry with a new sense of the artistic possibilities that lie within its proper sphere.[88]

Designer Christopher Dresser, who died the year before, in 1904, certainly understood the possibilities of links with industry, and successfully designed for industries producing carpets, wallpapers, furniture, metalwork, pottery, glass and textiles. However, lasting links with industry were never really made in Britain for either art or the crafts. As early as 1888, the first of three congresses was held by the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, established in 1887 to promote the ideals of art in industry, brought together a wide range of interested bodies as diverse as members of the Royal Academy, socialists, scientific colour theorists, practical decorators, industrial villagers, manufacturers, art critics, painters and fine art professors.[89] 'One is struck,' said Gillian Naylor:

> ...by the radicalism, the prescience and sound common sense of many of the proposals. In spite of the existence, on the one hand, of a seemingly flourishing art industry, and on the other of a healthy renaissance of craft ideals, it was obvious to many of the speakers that Britain's success was based on the flimsiest of foundations, and that sound conditions, both for the advancement of art and its application to industry, were virtually non-existent.[90]

There was evidence even then of a rejection of Ruskinian ethics and aesthetics, and the beginning of a shift in attitudes towards the necessity of a machine, opposed to a craft, aesthetic. In his presidential address to the second congress in 1889, for example, architect R. Rowland Anderson said: 'The designing of machinery...has now reached such a high standard of excellence in function, form and expression that one is justified in saying that these things are entitled to rank as works of art as much as a painting, a piece of sculpture, or a building, and also that machinery is the only true constructive art that has been produced since the decline of mediaeval architecture.'[91] And in 1893 John Sedding argued that future programs of reform had to be directed towards factory production:

> The designer should be part of the working staff of the factory, see his design take shape, and be consulted as required. We have had enough of mere design studios...[and technical schools]. The best school for art-industry is a

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[88]Walter Crane *Ideals in Art* 1905 30, cited in Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 148

[89]1888 congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, described by Walter Crane in Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 162

[90]Cited in Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 163

[91]R. Rowland Anderson, presidential address, section of Architecture, 'Home Arts and Industries' Transactions of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, Edinburgh meeting, 1889, London 1890 55. Cited in Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 163

> wholesome factory. And the ideal factory is a place where the artist-designer is a handicraftsman and the handicraftsman is an artist in his way.[92]

Gillian Naylor observes that 'both Ruskin and Morris died frustrated men, having spent their lives proselytizing a seemingly indifferent public', while Ashbee wrote in his memoirs: 'We have made of a great social movement, a narrow and tiresome aristocracy working with great skill for the very rich.'[93] It was not until just before World War I that Ashbee and Lethaby, by this time also influenced by American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, himself a disciple of Arts and Crafts ideals and known for his 'prairie house' design style, began to 'recognise that production by machinery was not necessarily wholly evil'.[94] Frank Lloyd Wright had said: 'the art of the future will be the expression of the individual artist through the thousand powers of the machine - the machine doing all those things that the individual workman cannot do. The creative artist is the man who controls all this and understands it.'[95]

Thus, the later contemporary crafts movement or revival, developed in part as a reaction to the post-war mass-produced items of a machine aesthetic, was clearly founded in similar earlier contradictions between ideals of hand and machine, the individual and society, art and industry.

Spread of influence

The route to Australia was not direct: these new ideas were to filter through adaptations and modifications in other centres along the way.

Largely influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, various secessionist groups were formed in other European countries as alternatives to the art academies. In Germany, the Deutscher Werkbünd was formed in 1907, and the Bauhaus design school was set up in 1919 directly influenced by the co-ordinating ideals of the Arts and Crafts philosophy. The prestigious Wiener Werkstätte, set up in Vienna in 1903, served 'a rich, sophisticated and cosmopolitan clientèle...in forms and patterns that anticipate the stylistic preoccupations of the 1920s and 1930s',[96] preoccupations that were initially centred on the ideals of Art Nouveau, a term that came into use in France in the 1890s for the new decorative style that followed the Arts and

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[92]John Sedding *Art and Handicraft* (1893), cited in Gillian Naylor ibid (1971) 165

[93]C R Ashbee 'Memoirs' unpublished typescript 1938 vol IV, cited in Gillian Naylor ibid (1971) 9

[94]Gillian Naylor ibid (1971) 165

[95]CR Ashbee Memoirs Vol I 242, cited in Gillian Naylor ibid (1971) 174

[96]The Deutscher Werkbünd was formed by Hermann Muthesius in 1907 as an organisation loosely based on the English guilds that he had visited, and werkstätten, or craft workshops, were established Germany from 1897. Similarly, the Wiener Werkstätte was set up by Hans Hoffmann in Vienna in 1903, modelled on the lines of Ashbee's Guild, and further influenced by Mackmurdo in London and those around designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Glasgow. Gillian Naylor, in Philippe Garner (ed) *Phaidon Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts 1890-1940* (1978) 30

Crafts aesthetic. Art Nouveau was characterised by romantic figures and abstracted floral motifs with sinuous lines, and continued in a popular form in Europe into the early twentieth century, and for some years longer in Australia and other more remote places.[97]

Denmark and Sweden developed national styles and led early modern design developments in Scandinavia, and the successful collaboration between artists, designers and industry in these countries, so influential from the 1930s, was first evident in the work shown in the Scandinavian exhibition in Copenhagen in 1888. 'By the 1950s...the Scandinavians had accomplished all that the Arts and Crafts movement had sought to achieve...', said Gillian Naylor:

> They had used their rich natural resources to realize Morris's ideal of a "decorative, noble, *popular* art", and because their concern went beyond appearance and finish, their pioneering work in anthropometric research provided a vital service for architects, designers and industry.[98]

In Britain, by contrast, Naylor notes that as Morris had once pointed out 'a reform in art which is founded on individualism must perish with the individuals who have set it going', and this, she suggested:

> ...was to be the fate of the British movement which in spite, or perhaps because of its social preoccupations, relied on individual rather than collective solutions...[It] had spawned a progeny of crafts and eccentrics, the 'arty crafty' with their aura of the homespun and the country dance...Britain had failed to produce a Werkbund or a Bauhaus; its reformers made little impression on industry...and latter-day manifestations [of workshops]...only served to emphasize the isolation of the artist/craftsman and to set him apart from the rest of the community.[99]

Writing in 1971 about the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement and its relationship to art and design, Naylor concluded:

> The most urgent task for the twentieth century...was to reconcile the claims of the individual with the requirements of the mass market, to equate subjectivity with standardisation, and, in effect, to apply the Arts and Crafts ideals of fitness and truth to material to the machine-made product.[100]

The Arts and Crafts movement in Australia

By 1900 the scientific, industrial and technical development that had taken place in Europe had resulted in the introduction to Australia of new engineering and technology, such as railways, steam trams, electricity, telegraph, refrigeration and motorcars. Training in metalwork, furniture, glass and pottery occurred through apprenticeships in those industries, to those who

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[97]Art Nouveau was also known in different places as Jugendstil, Sezession-still, Modern Style, Arte Joven, Niewe Kunst and Stile Liberty.

[98]Gillian Naylor ibid (1978) 193/4

[99]Gillian Naylor ibid (1978) 191

[100]Gillian Naylor ibid (1978) 177

had trained overseas. Most - but not all - domestic items, such as furniture, textiles, glass, crockery and cutlery, were still imported because it was cheaper than setting up industries for the, as yet, small local markets.

Like many imported 'movements', the Arts and Crafts movement, with its ideals of harmoniously integrating work and life, appears to have been-practised in Australia largely as a hybrid style and philosophy, detached from its original socialist base. Its products often show elements of other influences, and while its activities have continued in different forms, the specific ideals of the movement probably lasted barely two decades.

The predominant influence in the arts and architecture in Australia was British, largely because the teachers here had trained in the 'South Kensington' system, subscribed to the magazine *Studio*, and continued to travel to and study in Britain. Arts and Crafts ideals, as they came to Australia, were also interlaced with the design style of Art Nouveau, and the Aesthetic movement that removed the arts from a social context and espoused 'Art for Art's sake'.

However, the thinking of American architects and designers such as those in Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie School of architecture, and the model of community crafts workshops like those at the Roycroft community in East Aurora, New York,[101] further contributed to the hybrid aesthetic and philosophy that was developing in Australia. T. J. Jackson Lears describes these contemporaneous American efforts towards change, as an antimodernist movement that reflected a move from a religious and work ethic to that of a personal therapeutic ideal: 'Towards the end of the nineteenth century,' he said:

> ...many beneficiaries of modern culture began to feel that they were its secret victims. Among the educated and affluent on either side of the Atlantic, antimodernism sentiments spread [as a] recoil from an 'overcivilised' modern existence to more intense forms of physical and spiritual experience supposedly embodied in medieval and oriental cultures...Aesthetes and reformers sought to recover the hard but satisfying life of the medieval craftsmen; militarists urged the rekindling of archaic martial vigor; religious doubters yearned for the fierce convictions of the peasant and the ecstasies of the mystic.[102]

Antimodernism, he argued, was a complex blend of accommodation and protest which tells us a great deal about the beginnings of present day values and attitudes. The crafts revival of the late nineteenth century in the United States drew on Puritan and republican traditions - particularly the deep distrust of urban 'luxury' and the faith in the ennobling powers of hard work and the

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[101]Elbert Green Hubbard founded the successful Roycroft workshops and press from 1985 after a visit to William Morris. See Leslie Green Bowman *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design* (1990) 64

[102]T J Jackson Lears *No Place of Grace* (1981) xiii-xviii

ethos of evangelical reform, 'spawning innumerable utopian communities and benevolent societies designed to mitigate social chaos by promoting self-improvement.'[103]

British and American ideas and examples undoubtedly affected thinking in Australia. In 1895 the new Australian magazine *Arts and Crafts* (1895-1898), drew attention to what the publishers saw as needs for great improvement in 'Art as applied to domestic purposes'. Despite its short duration, and apart from advocating for Australia what Peter Timms suggests was a probably unrealistic Ruskin and Morris-based doctrine, the magazine:

> ...did, however, campaign resolutely and intelligently for three reforms that would later become the cornerstones of the crafts movement in Australia: a system of arts education; the formation of working guilds of craftsmen; and the organisation of periodical arts and crafts exhibitions.[104]

In the establishment of Arts and Crafts societies in Australia, a number of factors appear common. Architects were often influential initiators or supporters, combining architecture and design in their own work, and involving other craftspeople in their projects.[105] Similarly, teachers of technical subjects and applied arts and artists who shared an interest and skills in the area,[106] provided important instruction on the one hand, and on the other needed the demands of the movement to reinforce the establishment of their courses. Only in New South Wales and Queensland does the membership of the societies appear to have consisted almost exclusively of women. The societies also had a high social profile, some having vice-regal patronage; and they also had support and membership from major institutions in each centre.

The opportunity to exhibit and sell work was attractive for skilled amateurs, usually women, who could gain some recognition and income from their work. Through the Arts and Crafts movement, and 'the early ideals of the Modern Movement', said Isabelle Anscombe:

> ...women gained access to workshops, schools and professional training and, most importantly, were gradually allowed by the social conventions of the day to put their "traditional" skills - a woman's touch about the home - to commercial use.[107]

At the same time the movement offered involvement in complex organisational events such as the First Australian Exhibition of Women's

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[103]T J Jackson Lears ibid (1981) 61

[104]Peter Timms *Australian Studio Pottery and China Painting* (1986) 4

[105]Architects, influential as designers in the Arts and Crafts Movement, formed their associations: 1851 in Australia, 1857 in America, 1905 in New Zealand, 1929 in Australia

[106]For example, Lucien Dechaineaux in Tasmania, Lucien Henry in Sydney, Harry P. Gill in South Australia, James W. R. Linton in Western Australia and Lewis J. Harvey in Queensland

[107]Isabelle Anscombe *A Woman's Touch, Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (1984) 12

Work in Melbourne in 1907.[108] Many amateurs were talented and highly skilled, having either studied overseas themselves, or received private tuition from others who had. Most were also versatile, working competently in a wide range of media. As it turned out, from 1914 World War I provided an unexpected focus for employment, teaching and production in the crafts, which not only changed crafts practice, but also contributed to the emancipation of women.

Most of the work that was made in Australia maintained the characteristics of the English Arts and Crafts movement in its robust design and faithfulness to the materials used and with conscious evidence of being handmade, though Australians tended to look to their own flora and fauna for design motifs, rather than English and European symbols. The movement thus supported the desire to find some symbolic expression of national identity, in a similar manner to what was happening elsewhere.

After the formation of the Tasmanian Arts and Crafts Society in 1903, others followed - Northern Tasmania and New South Wales in 1906, Victoria in 1908 and Brisbane in about 1912.[109] Before World War I, most societies were at their height of success and public interest, with clubrooms, libraries and classes.[110] When the societies became active again after 1919, Caroline Miley observed that 'a change in the character of the work displayed began to appear. The technical and industrial classes disappeared, to be replaced by an increased emphasis on home furnishings and the kinds of crafts that came to be considered typically feminine.'[111]

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[108] See Ann Stephen *Lip* (1977); and Caroline Miley 'Coming into Their Own, Women and the Decorative Arts 1890-1930' *Australian Antique Collector* Jan-June (1988) 76. See also Martha Sears's 1997-99 research (unpublished, Sydney) on earlier exhibitions of women's work.

[109] Societies were not formed in South Australia and Western Australia, but these states were well-served by teachers in art schools who espoused Arts and Crafts ideals and practices. Members frequently exhibited their work interstate, and some furthered connections by travelling interstate and overseas. For an extended summary of the Arts and Crafts movement in Australia, see Grace Cochrane *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* (1992) Chapter 1

[110] Members became engaged in other activities during the war: Peter Timms points out that the societies provided not only an outlet for craftwork but also an audience: 'their Red Cross handicraft work provided a modern realization of Ruskin's ideal of Art's moral crusade while, at the same time, the "high society" aspects of their exhibitions lent status and social acceptance to craftwork in middle-class Australian eyes'. Peter Timms op cit (1986) 23

[111] These included 'crochet, raffia and needlework...the large impressive portières and hangings embroidered or stencilled by prewar members gave way to tray-cloths and doyleys. There was less interest in wood and metal work, [and]...the evidence suggests that the Societies were degenerating into hobby groups...the movement, if defined by an adherence of some sort to the principles enunciated by the leaders of the English movement, had ceased by about 1925.' Caroline Miley op cit (1986) 26

In the United States, T. J. Jackson Lears argued that by World War 1, American crafts leaders had lost sight of religious or communal frameworks of meaning outside the self. The American experience of these changes was to later influence the Australian contemporary crafts movement considerably. 'The ideal of joyful labor, when it was not submerged by aestheticism,' said Lears, 'became a means of personal revitalization rather than a path to renewed community. In part a reaction against therapeutic self-absorbtion, the revival of handicraft ultimately became another form of therapy for an overcivilized bourgeoisie.'[112] He acknowledged that this movement, and the ideals it espoused, were also part of a continuing tradition that anticipated the agrarian communities of both the New Deal era of the 1930s and the rural communes of the 1960s, and 'also served as intellectual ancestors of decentralist intellectuals in our own time'.[113]

The influence of the Arts and Crafts movement was also evident in the development of Australian art schools. Most had been set up initially to provide a moral rather than a material education,[114] and many of the earliest, such as the Tasmanian School of Art, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and East Sydney Technical College had their beginnings as art departments in technical colleges, which started to appear in the 1880s, some of which in turn had grown out of mechanics institutes or schools of art from the 1820s.[115] The technical colleges were established to train local tradesmen such as plumbers, plasterers, carpenters, joiners, metalworkers and stonemasons, and in some areas people with specific skills and knowledge associated with mining industries.[116]

Art education in such schools, as Lindsay Broughton points out in his history of the Tasmanian School of Art, was both an agent for civilisation and a means of ensuring that artisans were able to properly and skilfully decorate or ornament their work. 'Art' in this sense was 'applied art', the application of

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[112]T J Jackson Lears ibid (1981) 65

[113]Such as Paul Goodman, Lewis Mumford, and E. F. Schumacher

[114]Donald Horne notes in *The Story of the Australian People* (1985) 54, that from 1827 the mechanics institutes or schools of arts offered the first serious attempt to teach the applied arts, providing theoretical aspects of practical subjects, usually in the form of evening classes, within an overall moral educational objective. The first mechanics institute was established in Hobart Town in 1827, following the British model.

[115]Key figures included J.W.R. Linton at Perth Technical College; L.J. Harvey at the Brisbane Central Technical College; Lucien Dechaineux and Mildred Lovatt at the Hobart Technical College; J.A. Peach at the Sydney Technical College; H.P. Gill and then L.H. Howie at the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts.

[116] In 1884, for example, W.H. Charpentier proposed to the chairman of the Board of Education in Hobart that the 'primary object' of his proposed art school should be 'the Art Education of Artisans as applicable in their daily work and in such a manner as to quicken their imagination and raise their taste to understand the beauty of form and proportion.' W H Charpentier in a letter to the chairman of the Board of Education, Hobart, 1884, proposing the establishment of an Art School; cited in Lindsay Broughton *A Place for Art, a Century of Art, Craft, Design and Industrial Arts Education in Hobart* (1988) 20

ornament to an object in order to add beauty to it, and this ornamentation was drawn from historical styles, often through the use of natural forms or motifs. These schools or art departments drew on the example set by the National Art Training School in South Kensington, London, which integrated such cultural objectives with a need to improve British manufacturing industry. For many years the work of Australian art students was even sent there for examination assessment.[117]

The enthusiasm for the Arts and Crafts movement in Australia from the late 1890s, and the formation of societies for promoting its ideals in the first decade of the new century, very much influenced the courses that were offered in these schools.[118] And from the early 1900s the increasing availability of secondary education and the already existing primary education system, meant that a number of teachers colleges were established to provide the necessary teachers.[119]

While some of the Arts and Crafts societies continued between the wars, their influence as a nation-wide movement waned as they became more distant from the movement's original ideals and as other economic and philosophical issues emerged. However, they nonetheless provided a practical and ideological foundation for the development of the postwar crafts movement.

The influence of Modernism

By the 1930s the influence of Modernism in art and architecture, as a contrast to Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau ideals, had reached Australia from Britain, Europe and the United States. For craftspeople, Modernism offered a fresh, new way of considering their roles as makers; of experiencing new ideas in both art and design; and the opportunity to use new technologies and materials in design and production. At the same time, it was to become so associated with consumerist production that for some it prompted a retreat to previous perceived 'traditional' values of life and work.

Modernism: a new approach

From the late nineteenth century, through a series of 'avant-garde' art movements, Modernism had brought a new approach to making art: its content

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[117]The art departments in technical colleges taught design, drawing, and sculpture (modelling), and later, china painting, woodcarving and metalwork. 'Art' or 'drawing' could sometimes mean trade drawing. Art courses were basic training for mechanical or sanitary engineers, plumbers, metalworkers, joiners, carpenters and masons.

[118]A great deal was learnt from private tutors. Some art schools, such as those in Adelaide and Melbourne, were attached to galleries, museums and libraries, usually sharing trustees. Others, such as the Julian Ashton School of Art in Sydney, were set up as private schools.

[119] The first were the Fort Street Model School in Sydney in 1850 and the Melbourne Model School in 1854, with others following, such as Claremenot Teachers College in WA in 1905, Sydney Teachers College in 1906 and Queensland Teachers College in 1914.

and form were defined by people who were not constrained by social or religious concerns, and who were reacting against both rapid changes in society and what they saw as the moribund art of the academies. Artists broke away from historical and romantic themes and styles, and focused instead on subjects of the present and the everyday. They drew on a wide range of new sources for their ideas (such as primitive art and Asian art, and the aesthetic of industry), used new ways of applying their materials and were interested in breaking accepted 'rules', of, for example, perspective and the use of colour. The new idea of the symbols of the 'unconscious', discussed by Sigmund Freud and others from the 1880s, further promoted the perception of the artist as an expressive individual.

In relation to the crafts, it is now claimed that, at this point, 'decorative art and decorative art impulses' played a crucial role 'in the formation and emergence of some of the major modernist styles of the early twentieth century': a tradition to which Norma Broude suggested in 1980, many of our most important feminist artists were heir. The abstracted curvilinear forms, allover patterns and decorative shapes of 'Art Nouveau and the Jugendstil arts and crafts movement,' she said, 'with their basis in late nineteenth-century Symbolist thought, acted as important liberating catalysts for major artists like Henri Matisse and Wassily Kandinsky, as well as for that entire segment of twentieth-century art which seeks to convey content and meaning through abstract and non-objective forms'.[120]

The Modern Movement generally refers to an attitude to modern architecture and design that advocated elimination of unneccesary decoration. The desire for a 'functionalist' aesthetic grew in Europe through the various offshoots of the Arts and Crafts movement, including the Bauhaus design school in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s which was influential in defining new relationships between art, craft and industry, and which developed a new attitude towards the design and production of buildings, furniture and utensils. It had roots in the machine ideology of the Futurist art movement of the 1910s and 1920s; in the beliefs of the Russian and Dutch Constructivist artists that meaning could be found in revealing the structural materials and processes of a work.

For most, the Modern Movement meant developing new, modern styles based on the ideas of 'form following function' or 'fitness for purpose'. The superficial application of decoration and ornament was strongly rejected, as were historical decorative references. Modernist designers preferred simple, rational, geometric forms, and rejected national, regional and vernacular styles, claiming that Modernism was international. Modernists retained humanitarian ideals: they were frequently 'inspired by socialist ideals and

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[120]Norma Broude 'Miriam Shapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrad (ed) *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) 319, 328, 315

wished to sweep away the old order to create a brave new world which would in itself improve human behaviour'.[121]

Developments abroad

For most Australians, Modernism was first experienced through publications. It was not until the 1930s that Australians would actually see English and European contemporary painting, for example, in the *Herald* exhibition in Melbourne in 1939.[122]

For others, travel was the only way to experience new forms and ideas. As a young interior 'decorator' visiting England from Australia in the 1930s, Margaret Lord was typically responsive to modernist ideas:

> Functionalism sums up the ideals of these modern designers. Their principal idea was that form - three-dimensional shape - should be governed by use, the function of the thing, the material used, and the method of manufacture. The Functionalists believed that if these requirements were perfectly understood, the resulting building, chair or cooking utensil should be pleasing to look at, even beautiful.[123]

In Britain, with the legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement, the liaison between crafts and industry was never so innovatively established: the crafts came to be practised not so much in relationship to industry, or even as part of an idealised village economy, but as part of an independent way of life. This may have been as much by necessity as choice, and the economic depression of the 1930s made alternative forms of income essential for many. However, Australia's strong economic, social and educational ties with Britain in the post-war period meant that Britain's design influence remained considerable. The British policies and their promotions, through, for example, the Britain Can Make It exhibition in 1946, led to the establishment of vocationally oriented design courses in education, which were in turn to influence Australian education.

But by the Festival of Britain in 1951 (organised to establish confidence in Britain's future), popular opinion had rejected the prescriptive 'good taste' of the British Board of Trade's Utility Furniture Committee and the Utility

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[121] John A Walker *Art in the Age of Mass Media* (1983) 80

[122] See Bernard Smith *Place Taste and Tradition* (1979) 186. The beginnings of Modernism in the visual arts in Australia are traced by Bernard Smith to the study of newspaper photographs, postcards and prints of Impressionist works brought to Australia in about 1913, while the magazine *Art in Australia* (established in 1916), was also publishing modernist work at that time.

[123] Lord cited as the key influences for designers like herself, the architects Le Corbusier in Switzerland and Walter Gropius, who established the Bauhaus School in 1919; the 'Paris exhibition' of 1925; and the work of architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States. Margaret Lord *An Interior Decorator's World* (1969) 35

Design Panel, set up in 1942.[124] The British 'Festival', or later, 'Contemporary', style was decorative, whimsical and novel, using abstract shapes, thin lines and molecular structures in graphic, textile and furniture design, and in ceramic decoration. In 1955 Reyner Banham expressed the new mood: 'we live in a throwaway economy, a culture in which the most fundamental classification of our ideas and worldly possessions is in terms of their relative expendability'.[125]

Isabelle Anscombe considers that the 1956 design awards in Britain marked the start of the sexual division between decorative and functional design, a concept that was reminiscent of Parker and Pollock's observations of nineteenth century social changes and their effect of perceptions between art and the crafts. It also anticipated later discussions between the relative values of art and craft, when the women's art movement became active in the 1970s.[126]

The United States, like Australia, had a strong pioneering background and was renowned for its early skilled resourcefulness in the making of, for example, tools, quilts and furniture. Similarly, Americans had adopted the Arts and Crafts movement, and focused their attention, through the British *Studio* magazine and through travel, on what was happening in Britain and, later, in Europe. Leslie Green Bowman suggests that 'the success of the movement in the United States rested on compromises that adapted it to American capitalism'; they were not elevated (at that stage) 'out of industry into the fine arts, but instead were adapted to industry'.[127] The workshops of the Roycroft community, and Gustav Stickley's furniture workshop, were successful because of highly effective marketing strategies.[128] Meanwhile, the geometric Art Deco design style of the 1930s in Europe[129] developed as a 'streamlined' Art Moderne design style in the United States. Modernism became quickly absorbed into the vast industrial empires in the 1930s and was used as a means of designing in industry to attract a consumer, for profit. New technologies

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[124] Rationing and shortage of supplies in Britain led to the establishment in 1942 of the Utility Furniture Committee and the Utility Design Panel. These were set up both to improve the 'good taste' of the public and to promote design through producing low-cost utilitarian furniture, textiles and tableware for industry.

[125] Reyner Banham 'A Throwaway Aesthetic' 1960, cited in Penny *Sparke An Introduction to Design and Culture in the 20th Century* (1986) 51

[126] Anscome noted that advertising and office design were identified with culture (men), while, for example, interior decoration and independent craft workshops were associated with nature (women). She concluded that women were never able to develop the design influence they had gained in the interwar years. To compensate, their role in the home was glamorised, so that housework was promoted not just as a skill but a joy. Isabelle Anscombe *A Woman's Touch, Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (1984) 187-8

[127] Leslie Green Bowman, *American Arts & Crafts: Virtue in Design* (1992) 33

[128] Leslie Green Bowman ibid (1992) 34

[129] The term Art Deco emerged from the Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, in 1925

were embraced here because of labour shortages, whereas in Britain machines were seen to threaten employment.

International functionalism, as it had developed through furniture design and architecture from the Bauhaus, moved to the United States of America through the migration of modernist designers and architects like, for example, Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius and Mies Van der Rohe. Their concerns for the relationships between form and function were supported by the design department at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Here, design competitions and Good Design exhibitions attempted to change mass design taste from the commercial styling extravagances of the 1930s.[130]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s new consumer objects were made using the new moulding technology, providing low-cost, portable, mass-produced items in what became known as the Contemporary style.[131] After the war, new economic and social links were developed between Australia and the United States. The United States was keen to establish markets in Australia, and Australia was interested in looking towards American design and industry, both to import products and to reproduce them, in order to be 'modern'.

Simultaneously, Scandinavian furniture, metal, glass, and textiles industries continued to make the simple, elegant products from their natural resources for which they had become known in the 1930s, and from the 1950s embarked on well-focused marketing programs in countries outside Europe like Australia and New Zealand. The relationship of the crafts to industry through design, observed Gillian Naylor, was achieved more successfully in Scandinavia than elsewhere:

> Of all the countries in Europe, the Scandinavians were, of course, in a unique position to exploit this essentially humanistic tradition. Their industries were craft-based, the Industrial Revolution did not scar them, so that they were able, when necessary, to absorb the advantages of technical change, and their work needed no proselytizing to establish its validity.[132]

The Scandinavian industrial practice of employing artists and craftspeople as designers, allowing them freedom to experiment with their own work as well as designing for production, became an ideal for many people in other countries, and Australians aspired to setting up similar models in later years.

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[130] The 1940 Organic Design in Home Furnishings exhibition was the first of these exhibitions; designers Charles and Ray Eames and Eero Saarinen introduced furniture designed in free organic forms, using moulding techniques and synthetic materials often developed for the aeronautics industry. See Philippe Garner *Contemporary Decorative Arts, 1940 to the Present Day* (1980) 29-33

[131] New technology also affected other areas of crafts production. The use, for example, of space-age technology in the production of glass by Dominick Labino and Harvey Littleton at Toledo in the United States in 1962 was to make it possible for glassworkers to work alone or in small group studio-workshops.

[132] Gillian Naylor op cit (1971) 194

The Italian design model was also of interest: small, often family industries oriented their products towards a small wealthy market.[133]

Australians began to travel to these centres, saw illustrations of modernist art and design in journals and magazines and increasingly, especially from the 1960s, also saw imported items in the emerging design stores in Australia.[134] The establishment of exhibition centres overseas, like Den Permanente in Denmark in 1936, and organisations, like the Design Association of Japan in 1954, were also to provide later links for Australians.

Australia imported both modernist and crafts revivalist attitudes along with the post-war migration program, the import of influential books and magazines and the early employment many of its young designers trained overseas.

The beginnings of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia

The contemporary crafts movement in Australia in the 1940s and early 1950s was not yet an organised movement, nor did craftspeople share a common philosophy. Some were encouraged by Modernism; others rejected it.

However, a number of factors contributed to a climate that encouraged what eventually did became a 'movement': one that was to find greater political and economic force for promoting beliefs through combining interests and energies. Two of these factors were changes in education and the effects of mass-production.

Post-war education: ideals and opportunities

Changing ideals and opportunities in education clearly affected the developing idea of studio crafts practice as a professional, personally rewarding way of life. Post-war eduaction emphasised the development of the individual as a 'whole self' through creative experience.

Some of the important changes in thinking about education started in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Here, psychologist William James and philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce had developed ideas in response to current questions such as: 'given the advance of science, where then do values reside? How can truth and knowledge be identified in a universe if it is in ever-changing, impermanent, unknowable flux?'[135] The core of James's philosophy, summarised James Bowen, 'was in the notion of experience as the central knowable reality'. While 'challenging both unthinking, conservative,

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[133] The Milan Triennale exhibitions were particularly important events, not only for the promotion of Italian work, but also for the exhibition of work of other countries, notably of Finland in the early 1950s.

[134] Examples include David Foulkes-Taylor's Design Centre in Perth; DDC (Danish Design Centre) in Sydney; Artes in Sydney.

[135] James Bowen *A History of Western Education Vol 3: the Modern West* (1986) 411

religious interpretations, as well as the nihilistic, mechanist explanations of scientific positivism', William James also offered a new idea of education, where schools should be concerned with 'helping the child to develop a wide receptivity to the experiences around him'.[136] In Britain, whose education system most directly influenced Australia, some of the progressive ideas were adopted and provisions were also made to ensure secondary school education for all.

Brian Crittenden's account of the characteristics of Australian education between 1945-1960 shows a marked increase in the provision of education, especially an increase in secondary education, but a slow move away from the pre-war centralised system with uniform curricula that gave a low status to the social sciences and the arts in secondary education.[137] However, leaning on the writings of Herbert Read and Viktor Lowenfeld, as well as the examples of 'progressive educationists' such as Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori in Europe, and John Dewey in the United States, there was a move in some quarters in the late 1940s towards a primary school education that emphasised the development of the whole person through creative activity.[138]

Following James and Pierce, philosopher and psychologist John Dewey had argued that 'education at the beginning of the twentieth century was almost totally meaningless: it was the training of slaves.' He saw the school as a laboratory of 'activity' learning, and was opposed to the 'dualism of traditional metaphysics (mind-body, subject-object, being-becoming, and so on).'[139] His important book *Democracy in Education*, published in 1916, led to the development of the Progressive Education Association in America in 1919, and his views on experience-centred education were taken up in other countries like Australia during the next two decades.[140]

Education and the arts

For many, like Winifred West, who in 1941 established the Sturt community craft and cultural workshops in Mittagong, New South Wales, following her retirement as headmistress of Frensham School, art was seen from the 1940s to the 1960s as a way of returning 'humanist' qualities to education - meeting

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[136]James Bowen ibid (1986) 413-4

[137]Brian Crittenden 'Theoretical Assumptions in the Recent Development of Australian Education' in Peter Karmel (ed) *Education, Change and Society* (1980) 3-4

[138]See for example, James Bowen op cit (1986) Chapters 11 and 12

[139] Dewey disagreed with the separation of the curriculum into bodies of knowledge that were devoid of real content, imposed in an authoritarian fashion and removed from an experiential context, because such education made it impossible for people to develop their own path 'in the light of continued social experience'. James Bowen ibid (1986) 424-5

[140]As were the views of Austrian educator Maria Montessori, and in art, the work of British writer Herbert Read, in his *Education through Art* (1943).

personal, emotional and spiritual needs rather than material ones.[141] The values of 'learning-by-doing' or 'learning-by-experience' provided those who were to become artists and craftspeople in the post-war period, an education that was intended to involve both 'mind and body'.[142]

Writing in a collection of essays on education through art in Australia, compiled by Bernard Smith in 1958, Joseph Burke proposed three aims of art education: to teach art as a creative activity; to teach that all great art bears the hall-mark of truth to its own age; and to teach art as a whole environment. 'It embraces almost everything man-made in this environment, from industrial products to handicrafts;' he said, 'for what is there made by man in which the element of design does not play a part?'[143] The point of view that the arts should be integrated into education, and that education could be through the arts, was implicit not only in the ideals of emerging crafts organisations but also in the professional organisations of art teachers.[144] In Victoria, for example, crafts development by the 1960s was strongly tied to teacher education. Metalsmith and lecturer Ray Stebbins, who was training to be an art teacher at that time, recalled:

> In the 1960s there was an enormous push towards creativity and defusing prescriptive courses, through establishing a Primary Art-Craft Branch, a special curriculum, primary specialist teachers and two to three hundred specialist classrooms. All this was very 'progressive'.[145]

Commitment to the teaching of the arts in the 1940s as a necessary aspect of creative development for children, had also extended to the wider population. The Central Cultural Council and the New South Wales Public Schools Teachers Federation, for example, organised a People's Conference to discuss how a permanent, mass cultural movement could be created through educational, industrial and community groups. One artist, Hayward Veal,

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[141] See Winifred West 'Sturt Summer School (1966)' in Priscilla Kennedy (ed) *Addresses and Talks* (1973) 89

[142] Tasmania was one state that introduced a new curriculum in 1942 that placed less emphasis on academic studies and more on cultural vocational studies. And in 1945 the New Zealand education department introduced a new art scheme for primary schools that was consciously based on overseas models and research on child development, and was concerned with the opportunity for self-expression, an appreciation of beauty and the acquisition of skill - in both art and the crafts. Ray Thorburn, Peter Smith *Art in Schools: the New Zealand Experience* (1978)

[143] Joseph Burke 'Art and the Australian Community' in Bernard Smith (ed) *Education Through Art in Australia* (1958) 3-6

[144] ASEA (Australian Society for Education through the Arts) was established at a UNESCO seminar in Canberra in 1963, during a visit to Australia by British education theorist Sir Herbert Read, whose lectures here were published as *Art and Education* in 1964. State organisations developed, like the Victorian Art/Craft Teachers Association in 1972, as an amalgamation of existing organisations.

[145] Interview with Ray Stebbins (1986). He cites Max Dimmack's *Modern Art Education in the Primary School* (1958) and Graham Hopwood's *Art Student's Handbook* (1955) as two Australian books that supplemented the enlightened teacher education program there.

'initiated a workers art exhibition in his factory, and was the force in founding the Encouragement of Art Movement (EAM) in 1944,' that had aimed to encourage workers to produce their own art and craft products.[146]

Numerous other groups had developed during the war, and it was believed that, as the war ended, these achievements should not be allowed to disappear. The Arts Council, for example, was founded in 1946 following the example of the Arts Council of Great Britain, and the belief that the arts needed to be taken to people living outside the Australian metropolitan areas.[147]

Many of those associated with the Arts and Crafts societies of the previous forty years remained active after the war (and two societies continued to operate in the 1990s), though by now much of the Ruskin-Morris philosophy appeared to have been superseded by the societies' practical involvement with occupational therapy through teaching crafts skills to wounded and disabled servicemen in Australian hospitals.[148] For many, teaching itself provided employment and an opportunity to extend skills.[149]

Rehabilitation opportunities for returned servicemen included training in art schools and technical colleges. A number of these people, like potter Peter Rushforth, who was to teach at the important ceramics course at East Sydney Technical College from 1953 to 1978, became teachers for the next wave of interest as the schools increased and developed. Other models of professional practice were provided by the Sturt workshops, established in 1941, and by teachers like refugee Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack who had trained at the Bauhaus and taught at Geelong Grammar School in the 1940s and early 1950s. A design course had been run by Phyllis Shillito at East Sydney Technical College from the late 1930s (followed by her own design school from 1960), and the first industrial design course was established at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1953.

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[146] Many exhibitions were held throughout the country. Workers received no formal tuition, but it was generally believed that they would enjoy creative work, and that it would give them greater cultural awareness and appreciation and lay a solid foundation for a vigorous and popular Australian culture. See Ian Burn and Sandy Kirby *Working Art* (1985) 57, 95

[147] Branches were gradually formed in each state, fulfilling slightly different roles according to how they were funded, and a national body was formed in 1966. For an extended summary see Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) 83

[148] Apart from the many General Repatriation hospitals, in August 1943, for example, there were also twenty-six Red Cross convalescent homes operating in Australia, many of which provided rehabilitation through craft activities, later to be carried out by occupational therapists. Interview with Moira Kerr (1986)

[149] Crafts in these places included weaving, spinning, rugmaking, tapestry, wool embroidery, basketry and rushwork, leatherwork, soft-toy-making, bookbinding, cord-knotting and netting, and linocut printing on fabric. Interview with Moira Kerr (1986). Kerr worked for the Red Cross in its Sydney centre from 1954 to 1966, and later was a key figure in the Crafts Councils and the Crafts Board of the Australia Council. See also Crafts Council of the ACT *Crafts of War* catalogue (1985)

Not only was there a great increase in the building of schools and teachers colleges, but there was also an increase in the number of universities, starting with the opening of the Australian National University in 1946. At the same time, technical colleges were funded for what was seen as their very different training role. It was largely through the technical and teachers colleges that crafts (and art) courses developed in Australia. By comparison, the crafts developed in universities in the United States, in schools of art and design in Britain, and in teachers colleges in New Zealand.

Thus, in Australia, the early stages of 'the binary system' were established, where training was identified with one type of institution, and research with another: a separation into education for either 'hands' or 'heads'.[150] This system was to further separate the intellectual from the practical, and the idea of 'art' from 'trades' and eventually the 'crafts'.

Modernism as consumerism

By the 1950s, once the recovery from war was over, interest in the creative development of the individual shifted to focus on the reinforcement of the independence of the nuclear family, and on personal material development.

The suburban dream was characterised by a consumerism for material goods that were 'modern', popular, labour-saving and entertaining, and this usually meant what was produced elsewhere and advertised in magazines. Mass-produced objects and appliances, made in new materials and designs, were cheap, standardised, popular and accessible for everyone.

Many artists and intellectuals tried to sever some of Australia's traditional cultural dependence from Britain; others in turn feared being swamped by American culture. A.A. Phillips complained in the 1950s about what he termed the 'cultural cringe', where anything overseas was seen to be better than that made in Australia.[151] Robin Boyd criticised post-war suburban architecture, where the standardised monotony was relieved by the addition of 'features' or what he called 'nervous architectural chattering' to give some individuality. 'Features' were also added to appliances and vehicles, to distinguish them from others and make them more appealing:

> ...so every year the radiator of the car grins wider, the handle of the refrigerator grows a bigger chrome escutcheon, the control panel of the stove gets more Martian, the sets of saucepans and bowls gleam with more jewel anodizing, the concrete grilles get more complicatedly geometric, the colours more vivid, the tiles more random, and the light shades...get more frantically pointed, holed, ringed, striated, twisted, and miserable.[152]

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[150]Refer Stephen Murray-Smith, John Dare *The Tech, a Centenary History of RMIT* (1987) 452-459 for a discussion of this division.

[151]A A Phillips *The Australian Tradition, Studies in a Colonial Culture* (1958) 89

[152]Robin Boyd *The Australian Ugliness* (1963) 21, 111

Other commentators, like Donald Horne and Craig McGregor, writing in the 1960s, were similarly critical of what they saw as Australian mediocrity and happy complacency.[153] And by 1967, although Australians were confident in their ability to do things 'such as building skyscrapers and turning rivers back through mountains', Robin Boyd was still saying: 'The broad picture of the nation is still one of a simple-minded leisurely hive of activity without a strong or challenging idea or policy of its own...Almost all the things we make here - cars, household appliances, many of the houses themselves - are copies of designs from overseas', sometimes plagiarised, but more often made legally under licence.[154]

Cultural commentators were not the only ones to be critical of what was seen as the ugliness, complacency and materialist consumerism of much of Australian life. Social, political and economic changes in Australia during and after World War II motivated in many people a desire to find a different way of living. There were many people who did not share an affection for the perceived inhumanity of increasingly available industrially-made objects.

From their various positions, craftspeople and designers worked towards organising themselves into activities and livelihoods that were more personally fulfilling, giving them more control of their own lives and a means of changing their lived environment in a more personal way.

Developing a crafts philosophy

Craftspeople in Australia at this time had come from many different starting points, and while some rejected Modernism others sought to be part of what it represented.

Some were skilled artisans in ceramics, glass, metalworking and textile industries. A few craftspeople, like jeweller Rhoda Wager (trained in the Arts and Crafts style in Glasgow, and working in Sydney from about 1914), and her niece Dorothy Wager from the late 1930s, were committed to running small businesses, often working to commission. Many continued to work within the Arts and Crafts societies, sometimes now linking their work with occupational therapy for soldier rehabilitation.[155] Many of the people concerned practised their craft in their spare time from other occupations, often in associated craft

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[153]See Donald Horne *The Australian People;* Robin Boyd *The Australian Ugliness;* Craig McGregor *Profile of Australia.*

[154]Robin Boyd 'The Australian Myth in the Modern World' *Artificial Australia: the Boyer Lectures 1967* Australian Broadcasting Commission 1967 46

[155]Increasing numbers of women had become competent practitioners, not only because of the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement but also because of the need for many to earn a living. The Country Women's Association, set up in 1922, was one organisation that had exerted considerable efforts to involve isolated women in learning domestic and creative skills. A state handicraft committee, for example, was set up in New South Wales in 1935, working for the Use More Wool campaigns; it organised a Fashion from Fleece display at the Royal Agricultural Show in 1938.

industries, while others used their work to finance another interest such as painting. Some craftspeople were part of families that had always been involved in art practice and debate.[156]

Some craftspeople were directly influenced by European artists such as Picasso, Miro and Dali who had been involved in the design and making of jewellery and furniture and stage or fashion design. Picasso's painterly decorations on earthenware pottery, produced at Vallauris in France from the late 1940s, were of particular influence to Australian potters who were also painters (such as David and Hermia Boyd). Others were aware of European ceramic artists Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, working in England from the 1940s, making refreshingly contemporary, stylish, modernist forms which were illustrated in magazines that were available in Australia, and who taught a generation of British potters with whom Australians were later to make connections.

Many, like weaver Erika Gretschel (later Semler) and jewellers and metalsmiths Niina Ots, Victor Vodicka and Wolf Wennrich, were migrants from Europe, bringing their apprenticeship training and experience in those countries with them. As well, there were designers associated with the new modernist architecture and the developing fields of industrial and interior design. Some of these had already established practices, like fabric designer Frances Burke (who set up the first registered screenprintery in Australia in 1937), the screenprinting business Annan, in Sydney, *(see Plate 6: following page)* and the weaving business *éclarté* in Melbourne, while others were the products of postwar training courses.[157] Many people who ultimately became designers had trained as architects, partly perhaps because there were very few opportunities to study design elsewhere. Others were professionals in other areas, such as Harold Hughan, who was an engineer and became interested in pottery through the involvement of his wife and son.

Studio crafts ideals

Most craftspeople at this time worked in relative isolation, with little contact or communication between main centres, and at first they had little feeling of shared identity. Most identified themselves by their specific occupation, for example, as jeweller, potter, artist-potter or weaver, and the term 'studio crafts' only later came to be used as a common philosophy developed.[158]

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[156]For example, the Boyd family at Murrumbeena; Victoria; the Lewers family at Emu Plains, NSW; the Skipper family at Monstsalvat, Eltham, Victoria.

[157]Annan was set up by Anne Outlaw and Alexandra (Nance) Mackenzie in Mosman, Sydney in 1941, and *éclarté* as established by Edith (Mollie) Grove and Catherine Hardress in Melbourne in 1940.

[158] Ideals generally held in common, however, placed an emphasis on the revival of traditions that valued the idea of working as an individual within society or a community, towards a lifestyle of self-sufficiency, and making utilitarian objects by hand from natural materials in an independent studio or workshop.

Plate 6: Annan Fabrics 1941-1955
(see page 60) (Alexandra) Nance Mackenzie (1912-1998, left) and Anne Outlaw (1891-1991) screenprint fabrics in their studio in Mosman, Sydney in the 1940s.

Mackenzie's designs drew on Australian flora and Aboriginal designs, and they learnt printing and dyeing skills by trial and error. To counteract competition from American imports, Annan focused on exclusive work printed to order and its fabrics were used extensively by architects and interior designers in Australia and overseas, especially those trying to say 'something Australian'. The fabrics were used in airport lounges in Melbourne, Sydney and Hawaii, and in the Australia Room on the ship *Himalaya*.

Many of the 'traditional' ideals followed by craftspeople after the Second World War, had themselves been recent revivals in the nineteenth century. Edward Lucie-Smith observed that after the war the traditional crafts were 'thought of in Britain as things to be fostered and protected against contemporary conditions...with a government-sponsored Rural Industries Bureau plus a network of craft guilds and societies.' He saw this as 'proof of the way in which handicraft had been pushed to the margin in little more than a century.'[159]

However, the intentions of the movement came not so much from a desire to revive tradition as an unchanging continuation of practices and values, as the invention of new traditions based on an idealised perception of the old, but in different circumstances.[160]

Peter Rushforth's explanation of his interest in Oriental ceramics from 1947 reflects one common feeling:

> There was only a handful of potters in the whole of Australia that you could call studio potters and they were mainly people who used the pots as a background for decoration. And there was a handful of commercial potteries and they had certain tricks up their sleeves, such as slip casting and so on, but this was all the antithesis of what I really wanted...I think my background was such that having had a diet of Eric Gill and Morris and Ruskin and Huxley and the Fabians I felt that I wanted something that had some meaning in life as far as work was concerned. In other words a fulfilment in a lifestyle.[161]

In Australia the most important eventual influence on the crafts in the postwar years was that of British potter, Bernard Leach, who published *A Potter's Book* in 1940. Leach had worked in Japan and had come in contact with the Japanese scholar Soetsu Yanagi, who founded the *mingei* movement in the 1920s to revive Japanese folk crafts, then had returned to England with potter Shoji Hamada in 1920 and set up a studio at St Ives.

The 'aesthetic theory of the [*mingei*] movement', said Yuko Kikuchi, 'emphasized the supreme beauty of hand-made folk crafts for ordinary use, made by unknown craftsmen working in groups, free of ego and free of desire to be famous or rich, merely working to earn their daily bread.' [162] Yanagi, whose writings were translated by Leach, categorised the beauty of folk crafts as: in naturalness (natural materials, handmade), in tradition in method and design, in simplicity in form and design, in plurality (repetition), in

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[159]Edward Lucie-Smith op cit (1981)

[160] See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) for a range of other examples on this

[161]Peter Rushforth unpublished draft script from seminar 'Shaping History' Powerhouse Museum (1989)

[162]Yuko Kikuchi 'The myth of Yanagi's originality: the formation of Mingei theory in its social and historical context' *Journal of Design History* 7/4 (1994) 247. Kikuchi acknowledges the initial questions about Yanagi's claims were raised by Brian Moeran in 1980 and 1989.

inexpensiveness, in selflessness (unknown), and in health (not fragile). In ceramics, these ideals embraced a stoneware, rather than an earthenware technology, producing forms in which the decoration was made from the effect of the firing process on the natural surfaces of clays and glazes.

Yuko Kikuchi argues, in fact, that, despite Yanagi's claims of originality and independence of precedents, he was in fact directly influenced by the work of William Morris; and that Leach played a contributing part in the development of the *mingei* theory. Kikuchi notes, for example, that from the late 1880s the Japanese government sent students abroad both to market Japanese crafts as exports, and to learn British scientific and industrial skills in order to combine 'Japanese mind with Western knowledge (*wakon yosai)*', and points out that the writings of Morris were well-known in Japan from that time.[163]

Leach combined the Japanese philosophies of a spiritual ordering of the domestic and working environment based on simplicity, harmony and beauty, with study and experience of ancient Chinese and Korean ceramics and many of the traditional forms of English ceramic wares - and an acknowledgement that in the West the studio potter cannot remain anonymous:

> 'Accepting the Sung[164] standard' is a very different thing from imitating particular Sung pieces. It means the use so far as possible of natural materials in the endeavour to obtain the best quality of body and glaze; in...a striving towards unity, spontaneity and a simplicity of form, and...the subordination of all attempts at technical cleverness to straightforward, un-selfconscious workmanship...We are not the Chinese of a thousand years ago, and the underlying racial and social and economic conditions which produced the Sung traditions in art will never be repeated; but that is no reason why we should not draw all the inspiration we can from the Sung potters.[165]

Many, like Peter Rushforth, found their philosophical model in these ideas *(see Plate 7: following page).* 'The thing that I tried to get greater and greater knowledge of,' he said, 'was inner development':

> You see, in the West before the industrial revolution you had handcraft [and workshop] potters. And then the factory system took over [with] the subdivision of labour; the aristocracy promoted porcelain and they liked a lot of gold and silver because it made them very important...Later on...the Bauhaus concept of a designer...was a sort of a god behind a curtain who was planning these objects for mass production. Now this is a different concept from the East and it is the Eastern concept as I see it that is the seed of what has interested so many people in the West. People wanted a creative, expressive, personalised, not dehumanised, activity... [There] was an attitude [in the classical period in the East] in which the personal, the individual, was an illusion. He was but part of the whole of an infinity that spread through the

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[163]Yuko Kikuchi ibid (1994) 251

[164]The term Sung, used at this time, is now more generally replaced by the term Song, following the Pinyin system of Romanisation of Mandarin Chinese.

[165]Bernard Leach *A Potters Book* (1940) 6

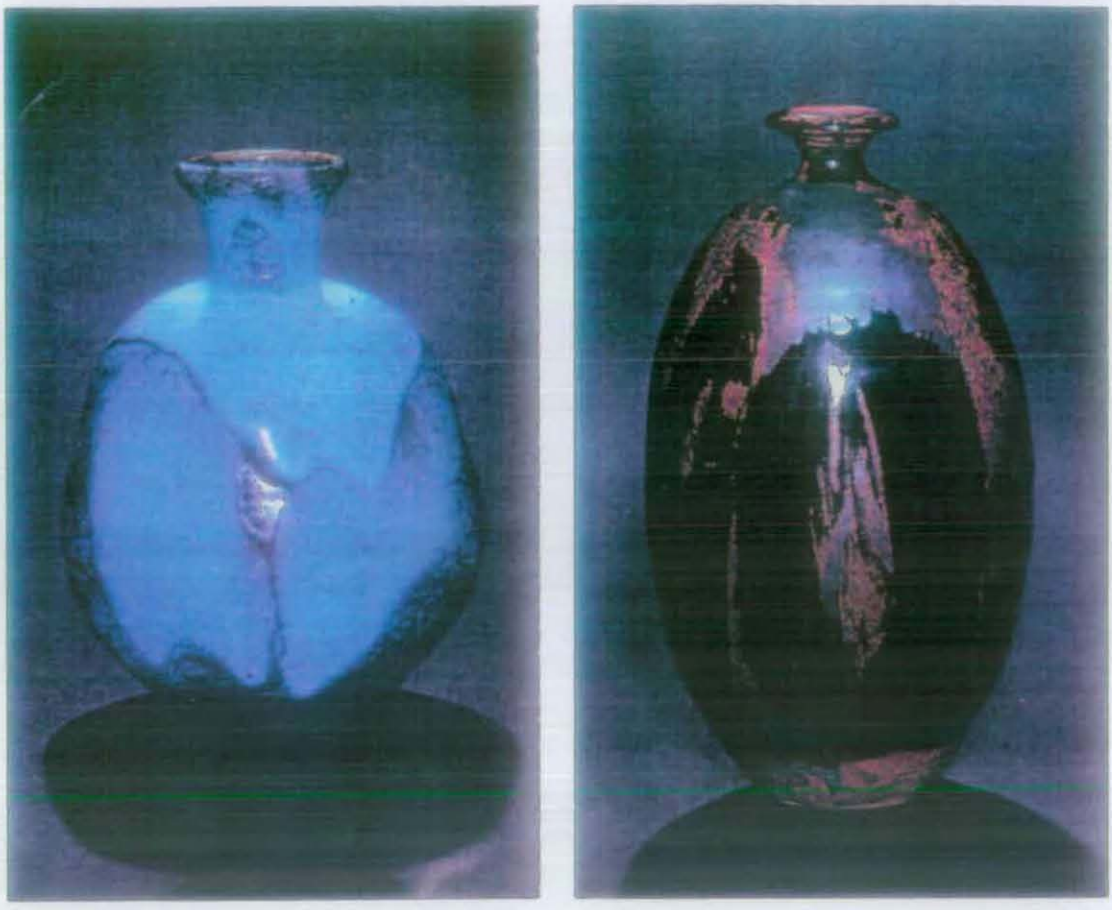

Plate 7: Peter Rushforth
(see page 62) Blossom jars, *Landscape* and *Form and Spirit*, stoneware with jun glaze (left) and tenmoku and iron glaze (right), made and woodfired at Shipley, Blue Mountains, NSW 1990. (27 x 14 and 42 x 18cm).

Peter Rushforth's (b.1920) explanation of his interest in Oriental ceramics from 1947 reflects one common feeling: 'The thing that I tried to get greater and greater knowledge of,' he said, 'was inner development...it is the Eastern concept as I see it that is the seed of what has interested so many people in the West. People wanted a creative, expressive, personalised, not dehumanised, activity... [there] was an attitude [in the classical period in the East] in which the personal, the individual, was an illusion. He was but part of the whole of an infinity that spread through the whole universe, the whole cosmos...it was this overall view that influenced the Zen masters to say...this must also permeate our living in everything we do and think ...so that objects that were used were beautiful and that beauty was to be used daily.' Peter Rushforth unpublished draft script from seminar 'Shaping History' Powerhouse Museum (1989).

> whole universe, the whole cosmos...it was this overall view that influenced the Zen masters to say that this must also permeate our living in everything we do and think...so that objects that were used were beautiful and that beauty was to be used daily.[166]

Bernard Leach's views on the values of folk crafts were not only shared but developed further by a number of his English contemporaries, such as weaver Ethel Mairet, woodworker David Pye, and potter Michael Cardew, and their views eventually became widely considered by practitioners in other fields. The contemporary crafts movement, through their influence, certainly reflected an alternative to the perceived inhumanity of the development of Modernism in design and industry.

But at the same time Ethel Mairet, who was instrumental in the revival of handweaving and who wrote *Handweaving Today* in 1939, also pointed out that while there were not more than half-a-dozen handweavers remaining in England at the turn of the century, the solution was not to 'develop a machine boycott' but to develop 'a machine mastery':

> ...which can become a means for the better ordering of life, easing hard or laborious work, making for the appreciation of beauty in city, village, home...We do not ask for leisure now without beauty, speed, efficiency, nor for speed without leisure, nor for beauty without speed, efficiency and leisure.

She argued that handweaving had 'set itself up on a pedestal as an art, instead of recognising its immense and interesting responsibilities to present needs and to the machine.'[167] In Australia, Winifred West similarly acknowledged that:

> We live in an age of machinery, and we need machinery just as we need control, but it must be used to benefit man, not to cheat him, to relieve him of drudgery and hack work, to produce goods which are useful and beautiful...Only as we recognise our social responsibility can machinery be beneficial.[168]

Thus, despite its avowed opposition to industry and the anonymity of its production systems and products, the crafts movement was inevitably shaped, not only by the views of such as Ethel Mairet, but also by the increasing influence of the forms and ideals of modernist European and Scandinavian design and architecture, the influence of the United States in new technologies and materials in design, and the related development of international individual reputations of high-profile designers and architects.

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[166]Peter Rushforth op cit (1989)

[167]Ethel Mairet *Handweaving Today: Traditions and Changes* Chapter 1, cited in John Houston op cit (1988) 9

[168]Winifred West 'Life Means this to Me' in Priscilla Kennedy op cit (1973) 70

The development of specialist groups

One of the phenomena of this period was the development of specialist crafts groups. While many were local and regional in their scope, others provided the first national networks of shared interests and information. These groups formed primarily to support their specialisation. In the absence of formal education, books, journals, technical information and sources of supply for materials and equipment, they sought out and shared what they could learn and find themselves. Their ideals were conservative, or at least pragmatic: to fulfil a creative interest, to maintain traditions and skills and to find markets. But the ideals had grown out of a philosophy based on the complex background of Morris, Leach, and the values of progressive education.

The Handweavers and Spinners Guild of New South Wales,[169] founded in 1947, was possibly the first of the specialist crafts groups to be formed after the war. Many of those who had been teaching in rehabilitation centres were 'fascinated by the scope of the loom, [and] continued to weave for their own interest', perhaps in response to others who 'were more interested in pursuing the excitements of the promised age of Science and Technology than in perpetuating skills of hand and eye'.[170] While members of Handweavers and Spinners Guilds were very skilled, they were generally, at first, not interested in making works for commercial gain, but saw themselves as amateurs. Mr Hall in Perth, for example, argued adamantly through the pages of the journal that work should not be sold. Nevertheless, members of the guilds were very enterprising in their efforts to promote their interests. Modernist architect Harry Seidler was invited to open the New South Wales guild's eighth exhibition in 1956, and spoke of the 'importance of individual creativeness in a world which is swamped with the products of industrialisation'.[171]

The Potters Society of New South Wales was formed in 1956[172] with four potters - Mollie Douglas, Peter Rushforth, Ivan McMeekin and Ivan Englund - who would meet and talk about pottery in their homes. The society was formed to 'encourage and foster the development, appreciation and recognition of potters and pottery'.[173] It was set up largely by people who were interested in pursuing the 'Leach' philosophy. Recalling the early years, Ivan Englund said 'We wanted to make pottery our life work and career, and to be professional we wanted to select for membership.'[174] Potential members were required to submit pots to a committee for approval.[175] Dozens of potters

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[169]Changed to 'of Australia' in 1954, and 'of New South Wales' again in 1958.

[170]Jean McMahon *Opera House Exhibition* catalogue Handweavers and Spinners Guild of NSW (1975)

[171]*Australian Handweaver and Spinner* Nov 1956 19

[172] This organisation became the Potters Society of Australia in 1967

[173]Membership brochure, Potters Society of Australia (1987)

[174]Interview with Ivan Englund (1986)

[175]The magazine *Pottery in Australia* was first published by the society in 1962. During the early years of the Potters Society a biennial exhibition of members' work was held in the Macquarie Galleries, but it became important to have permanent displays of potters' work

societies were formed from the 1960s, with a key society in each state that was usually linked in some way to the national body, making a very effective specialist network.[176]

Already in existence, but with completely different objectives, was the Ceramic Art and Fineware Association of Australia. It represented the many small commercial potteries like Studio Anna, Pate's Potteries and others in Sydney at that time producing handmade and slipcast earthenware, often decorated with hand painted motifs, and exhibited selected wares in Cannes, France in the 1950s.[177]

The Embroiderers Guild of New South Wales was established in 1957 as a branch of the Embroiderers Guild in London.[178] The standards were rigorously traditional: 'Embroidery in the Country Women's Association was organised to the nth degree in the fifties and sixties,' recalled Meg Douglas in Adelaide in 1986, 'with specific standards and very prescribed activities, not creative at all. On "table days" the first thing they would do would be to look at the back of a piece of work.'[179]

Meanwhile, post-war reconstruction and industrialisation provided opportunities for a new relationship between designers and industry and architecture, and designers started to form their own organisations.[180] A number of others followed,[181] including the Industrial Design Council of Australia, set up in 1958 by a group of professional designers and industry leaders who sought to promote the use of design in Australian industry and improve the competitiveness of Australian products in overseas markets.[182]

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and the society established premises at an early stage. In 1978 the Potters Society was the first organisation to hold a major national specialist conference.

[176]For details of other potters societies see Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) Chapters 4, 6, 8

[177]'Pottery exhibit from Australia' *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 April 1955

[178] Suburban and country embroiderers groups were formed from the early 1960s, and by 1971, when membership had reached over 2000, the NSW guild was autonomous. A library was established from the beginning; from 1958 instructional portfolios were prepared; and the monthly journal the *Record* was published from 1960. An extensive collection of historical and modern embroidery was begun. Guilds followed in other states,[178] often also starting as affiliated branches of the formal group affiliated to the Embroiderers Guild of Great Britain.

[179]Interview with Meg Douglas (1986)

[180]The first professional organisation to appear in Australia was the Society of Designers for Industry (SDI), which was formed in Victoria in 1948, following a number of earlier specialist societies such as: the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (1929); the Women's Industrial Arts Society (1935); the Australian Commercial and Industrial Artists Association (ACIAA 1937); the Design and Industries Association (DIA 1940). See Michael Bogle *Design in Australia* (1997) 111-116

[181]Interior Designers Association (IDA1951); Society of Industrial Designers Australia (SIDA 1958). The SDI joined the IDA to form the Industrial Design Institute of Australia (IDIA) in 1958. See Michael Bogle ibid (1997) 111-116 and *Design in Australia* 25th anniversary issue Nov 1983

[182]Geoffrey Caban *Careers in Design* (1987) 46 and Michael Bogle ibid (1997) 116

These design organisations, with their later government-subsidised design centres and journals, were to provide a professional 'modern' model for craftspeople. Many designers also belonged to crafts organisations, or displayed craftworks in display interiors, design showrooms and publications. As professional crafts organisations developed in the 1960s, they were generally keen to identify, or adopt, designers using 'crafts' materials (like screenprinted and woven textiles, timber furniture and ceramics) to complement their own professional identity.

Crafts communities

For the most part, craftspeople wanted little to do with industry at this time, and were more preoccupied in establishing a way of working that suited a crafts ideology. Some found the most supportive environment in small groups or communities, where they could set up workshops or studios.

From the 1940s, a few groups of craftspeople developed, who worked together in communities, often as families, for mutual artistic and economic support. These centres became a focus for the crafts movement as it started to develop a national identity and voice in the 1960s, for the way they provided an example of a working way of life around the crafts. Some were undoubtedly modelled on earlier English and American communities.[183] They were no doubt also aware of the artists camps, such as those associated with the painters of the 'Heidelberg School' in Australia in the late nineteenth century, and especially, more recently, the philosophies of the version of the Japanese folk-craft movement as it was publicised through Bernard Leach's writing from 1940.

Even the groups that were not crafts-based, were nonetheless perceived as a model of 'community'. Richard Haese describes the 'flight either to inner or outer Melbourne', for example, as the representation of a 'desire for a flexible, permissive and creative sense of community', and the recognition that suburbia contained the suburban mentality of petit-bourgeois values which were highly conservative, and a danger to freedom, creativity and progress.[184] During the 1930s the area round Eltham and Warrandyte on the outskirts of Melbourne, had become a place where artists - poets, writers and painters - came to live and work.[185] Collectors and supporters of contemporary art, John and Sunday Reed, moved to Heide, the old weatherboard farmhouse in the orcharding and dairying area near Heidelberg in 1935, providing a focus for talk and work.

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[183]Models of crafts communities included C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft at Chipping Camden in England and the various co-operative groups like the Roycroft and Stickley workshops in the United States.

[184]Richard Haese *Rebels and Precursors, the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*(1981) 28

[185] Penleigh Boyd, Connie Smith and artist Danila Vassilief, Clive and Janet Nield with their progressive school 'Koornong', playwright Adrian Lawlor and writer Alan Marshall all lived there.

In 1910 Merric Boyd had established himself as a potter, and later, with his wife Doris, set up a studio at Open Country Cottage at Murrumbeena in Victoria. The large Boyd household grew up with painting and potting around them, so when Arthur Boyd and his friend John Perceval were discharged from the army in 1944 it seemed natural to set up a pottery at Murrumbeena, near his parents, to make domestic wares for sale to help meet the postwar demand, and thus finance their painting. They set up what they called the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery, and as well as making commercial pieces for sale through the Ministry of Labour and National Service, Boyd and Perceval also made individual functional and sculptural works, while a third partner, Peter Herbst, managed the books.

During the 1940s Open Country Cottage became a haven not just for the Boyd family, but also their friends, 'becoming more and more a loose colony of artists and intellectuals - one of the very few enclaves that established themselves in the early forties to offer protection to radical modernists against the benumbing conservatism of Australian middle-class society'[186] Boyd and Perceval decorated their work in the manner of painters, often using religious or mythological imagery or painting comic scenes, in brushed underglaze colours.[187]

In 1935 Justus Jorgensen had moved his extended family to Eltham on the outskirts of Melbourne. Trained as an architect and an ex-student of painter Max Meldrum, he began to establish a community at Montsalvat, characteristically using pisé-de-tèrre and local stone to construct 'pseudo-medieval buildings'.[188] Jeweller and metalworker Matcham Skipper, who grew up and continued to live at Montsalvat, recalls Jorgensen as:

> ...a great talker and discourser, interested in psychology and behaviour, and capable of firing people's imaginations - the look of stone, the feel of wood - he used all that when he built up the dream of Montsalvat. He said that others shared money, whereas he believed in sharing labour so he could do things on a grander scale. It was the age when a lot of communities started; he said none of the American communities survived after the invention of the bicycle.

The ideals of skilled self-sufficiency were models for many outside the community, although Skipper observed that 'the Reeds thought Jorgensen was dragging up a dead tradition, following up an ideal of skill as art. They were

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[186]Peter Timms *Australian Studio Pottery and China Painting 1900-1950* (1986) 62

[187] Some artists worked a little in the Arthur Merric Boyd (AMB) pottery, while others stayed much longer, such as Neil Douglas, who introduced landscape painting to the pottery and eventually bought out Herbst's partnership. Though painting came first, pottery was an important activity for Boyd and Perceval, and by the end of the 1940s they were working on their own projects, often using the pottery, though by then they lived elsewhere. See Peter Timms ibid (1986) 69. See also Geoffrey Serle, *The Creative Spirit in Australia* (1987)

[188]Peter Timms op cit (1986) 27

into art as expression of social attitudes - human emotions, myths, expression of human spirit.' [189]

Potters Cottage was established in 1958 when five Warrandyte potters pooled their resources to set up a co-operative venture for selling their work.[190] Potters Cottage originated after the group decided to have a Christmas sale. Reg Preston recalls: 'Gus put cartoon signs on the road for five miles...people poured in; when it was all over we had a huge dish of Phyl's full of pound notes. This went on, with sale days once a year for a couple of years. Before that we put work in suitcases and took the bus or train to town - some to Edith McMillan at the Primrose Pottery Shop in Melbourne; cups and saucers to Margaret Jaye in Rowe Street in Sydney in the early 1950s. She was a demon; she wanted all production for eight shillings and sixpence a cup and saucer, in six colours.'[191] The establishment of Potters Cottage, however, proved not only to be important as a sales outlet, but also as a focal point for others to gather, talk and share their interest and information - even those from interstate.

One of the most influential models for the crafts movement was Sturt, a group of workshops set up in 1941 in rural Mittagong, New South Wales, by Winifred West when she retired as headmistress from Frensham School, which she had established in 1913.[192] This quite amazing woman was remarkably progressive in philosophical and educational issues.[193] Her greatest concerns were the development of imaginative thinking and original work, and the relationship of the individual to the community. In 1966 she argued:

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[189] The Skipper family had joined Jorgensen at an early stage of the development, helping build the first pisé house, when Matcham Skipper was 12 years old. Formal training was scoffed at: 'Why go to university when there was someone like Jorgensen?' In the ensuing years, writers, poets, artists and craftspeople came and went at Montsalvat, though the Skipper and Jorgensen families remained. Interview with Matcham Skipper (1986)

[190] Reg Preston had been working in Warrandyte since 1947, while Phyl Dunn had gone up originally to study painting with Danila Vassilief, and stayed to work with Preston. With Arthur Halpern, Gus McLaren, Charles Wilton, and John Hipwell as president, they raised capital of £100 and established themselves in Moonlight Cottage, an old wattle and daub structure reputedly built at night by a goldminer in the 1890s. Interview with Reg Preston (1986)

[191] Reg Preston ibid (1986)

[192] From its small start in 1941, teaching spinning and weaving, woodwork, painting, writing and composing simple tunes, to a small number of children, adult classes were added and new crafts introduced. In 1946 the wood workshop was built and the production weaving workshop was first set up in 1951 by Erika Gretschel (later Semler), a young weaver brought by Miss West from Germany, and the first professional person to be employed.

[193] Les Blakebrough, who was manager of Sturt for over a decade in the 1960s, remembered her saying, '"Miracles will happen if you let them." Winifred enveloped anyone; she was tireless, it was amazing the way she could get people on side.' He adds that her colleague Ruth Ainsworth also 'had a connection with [Rudolf] Steiner, and got involved in England with, for example, weaver Ethel Mairet and Roger Fry as well as Bernard Leach'. Interview with Les Blakebrough (1986)

> Too much emphasis has been placed on the accumulation of knowledge which is useful for passing examinations and too little on creative activities of mind and hand...Education should be concerned with experience and expression as well as with booklearning; it should be concerned with the development of the whole person, but we see the tragic waste of undeveloped talents and unexercised faculties. [194]

Elisabeth Nagel, who had been brought to Sturt from Germany to run the weaving workshop in 1959, knew Miss West very well:

> Sturt grew out of two things: it was heavily influenced by Morris in England, and by a whole philosophy of education tied up with that - hand and mind, and the love of gardening. Ruth Ainsworth, who was the art mistress at Frensham, had gone back to England and worked with Bernard Leach, and returned in 1936 and brought back spinning wheels, and one of the looms. The whole idea of Sturt was an educative one. Girls left school at 14. Winifred West thought it a good idea that they have another year to provide a broader education, so Sturt was founded for the local community in that sense, with drama, English, spinning and weaving, but the war came and this influenced the direction. Local women suffered shortages, and needed to be more self-sufficient, so they learned to spin and weave. Sturt only crystallised after about 1950 when it started to employ professional craftspeople to run some of its affairs and classes.[195]

The pottery workshop followed in 1954 becoming the first studio pottery in New South Wales to produce stoneware from local materials. In 1952 Miss West had persuaded Ivan McMeekin to return from England, where he had been working for three and a half years with potter Michael Cardew, himself a former student of Bernard Leach. At that stage only a few potters were working in stoneware, so not only did the buildings and equipment at Sturt have to be designed and built, but research had to be done into local clays and glazes as well. The introduction of professional craftspeople such as Erika Gretschel, the first weaver, and McMeekin, with very different motives, aims, needs and activities, radically changed the focus of Sturt's activities. Ivan McMeekin recalled:

> I think [Miss West] viewed my activities as too destructive to continue. And I suppose from her viewpoint, and given her values, she was right. As a philanthropic administrator she was primarily concerned with the people involved, their personal development, their welfare and happiness. I viewed them as members of a team which existed only to bring a particular sort of beauty into existence. In return for their hard work and long hours...they also

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[194]Winifred West 'Sturt Summer School (1966)' in Priscilla Kennedy op cit (1973) 89

[195]Interview with Elisabeth Nagel (1986). Before she arrived in 1959, Nagel had been running a workshop in the Black Forest. Her training had been to enable her to train apprentices, to run a master workshop, or to design for industry, but she would have had to have worked another three years in order to teach in Germany. She had 'never encountered amateurs'. In Australia, she thought that no one took weaving seriously because it had been used as occupational therapy.

> received a training which I feel has stood them all in very good stead. So it was a profound change, which the Sturt Association did not like or accept.'[196]

In reviewing the twenty-first annual October exhibition in 1962, architect Tom Heath observed that 'the great aim and achievement of Sturt has been in providing a working model of an institution which can serve the needs of the master craftsman, of education and of a rural community'.[197] Until the early 1980s, when other centres had developed in art schools and government-supported crafts workshops, Sturt remained one of the strongest centres of professional crafts activity in Australia.[198] It provided a most important model, where few others existed, for professional studio crafts practice and apprenticeship in clay, weaving and metalwork, and a practical example of an ideology that most people aspired to - and in an idyllic rural community. Everyone important in the international crafts world visited Sturt or gave workshops there, and it was a necessary pilgrimage for anyone travelling from interstate.

The crafts movement and social change

The crafts movement, alongside developments in the visual arts and design, was to gain strength in the 1960s at a time of rapid social change and increasing dissatisfaction with the 'Australian dream' of postwar security. The sixties, in Australia as elsewhere, were characterised by a broad questioning of authority and conventions across social and political structures.[199] Many of the protests came from youth, but artists, academics, intellectuals, business-people and the general public also took part. These sections of the community were not just protesting about specific issues; they were asking questions about inequalities of opportunity for a number of groups they believed to be disadvantaged. They recognised that their different views on issues such as gender, race and the protection of the environment had been suppressed through what were to be called the 'colonising' or 'imperialist' ideals of those in power or reflecting a mainstream or official view.[200]

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[196] Letter to author from Ivan McMeekin (1986)

[197] Tom Heath in *Architecture Australia* 1962, reprinted in *Pottery in Australia* May 1963

[198] Sturtmetal, the jewellery and metal workshop, was added in 1969 with Ray Norman managing it until 1985, and in 1973 a screenprinting, dyeing and graphic design workshop was set up with Richard and Dilys Brecknock.

[199] In Europe the key point of dissatisfaction was the eruption of student riots in Paris and other centres in 1968, as an expression of frustration at suppressive education systems. For the United States of America, and for Australia, questioning of authority was related to involvement in the Vietnam war.

[200] For example: it was seen that social structures like a gender-based language affected the social, political and economic status of women; questioning social structures also gave strength to those seeking racial equality: anti-apartheid demonstrations against South Africa and the Black Rights movement in the United States reinforced the Aboriginal protest movement and its supporters in Australia; concerns for the protection of the environment

Changes in thinking towards broader social and ethical concerns were direct criticisms of the longstanding ideal that 'progress' was related to 'development'. A number of countercultural moves were associated with social protest; many individuals and groups - like those in crafts communities - opted to remove themselves from the offending social structures and seek a more satisfying life on the city fringes, or in the country: seeking an 'alternative lifestyle'.

Margaret Munro-Clark's analysis of the development of rural communes in Australia during the sixties and into the seventies provides some basis for understanding the swell of interest in the simultaneous crafts movement. She points out that previously, social (and therefore political and economic) constraints of class, religion and gender had given people an unquestioned sense of identity and place. However, the multiple options for choice provided by the modern world broke down many of these belief systems and left a need for people to pursue their own individuality, often with a new, reinforcing group.

The pursuit of 'counter-modernisation' by those in the developing rural communes was also an underlying motive for many of those in the crafts movement.[201]

Public perception of the crafts

The ways in which the crafts were perceived or valued was reflected in the ways in which their products were sold or seen.

Public galleries in the 1920s and 1930s had collected mostly 'fine' art, although some important collections and bequests of overseas decorative arts made at this time later proved very influential as study collections to later practitioners.[202] From the 1930s the most important venues for prestigious travelling and local exhibitions were the galleries in the big city department stores like David Jones, Georges and Farmers.[203]

However, in each centre, small outlets had provided a marketplace that reflected both the taste of the time for an alternative to imported commercial wares, and the preferences of the makers. Locally made items not only

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included the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation's placement of Green Bans on buildings and parks.

[201]Margaret Munro-Clark *Communes in Rural Australia, the Movement since 1970* (1986)

[202]For example, in 1892 a collection of Doulton handpainted pottery was given to the Technological Museum in Sydney; followed by further gifts from Mr John Shorter in 1933 and 1942; in 1938 H.W. Kent gave a collection of Song Chinese ceramics to the National Gallery of Victoria.

[203]For example, Georges in Melbourne and the David Jones Gallery and Farmers in Sydney; for details of exhibitions at this time, and for examples of shops and galleries in most capital cities, see Grace Cochrane *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* (1992) Chapter 2.

provided a 'personal' hand-made identity: they were also readily available: Australian markets remained far from the traditional sources of manufacture. Much work was made as gifts for family and friends, while a great deal of work had been sold through Arts and Crafts society exhibitions, as a way of providing economic independence for the makers. Some small independent shops were very influential: in Melbourne, for example, the most fondly remembered place was the Primrose Pottery Shop, opened by Edith and Betty MacMillan in 1929.[204]

As well as the still important British magazine *Studio,* influential Australian popular magazines were among the few publications to document tastes in art, crafts, design and architecture.[205] A number of artists and craftspeople such as Margaret Preston, Marguerite Mahood and Eva Butchart contributed articles to magazines and to the Arts and Crafts Society newsletters, and Marguerite Mahood had also pioneered crafts information programs on the new ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) radio after 1932.[206]

Gradually some display rooms were set up in association with the development of interior design as a profession. In some cases these display rooms offered Australian fabrics, furniture and ceramics, and in others introduced imported 'designed' products, especially, later, from Scandinavia. These well-made, well-designed items were significant models not just for craftspeople, but also for the buying public. The early design showrooms included Margo Lewers's Notanda in Sydney in 1936,[207] furniture designer Frederick Ward's outlet in Melbourne from 1932[208] and textile designer Frances Burke's[209] first outlet, Good Design, in Hardware Street, Melbourne, in 1948. As well as selling their own work they showed that of other designers and sought to have the works included in interior design commissions. Design was also promoted through the ABC's series of radio talks in 1941 'Design in Everyday Things', which was accompanied by a booklet of the same name.

Following the lead of the United States in particular, this period saw the emergence of dealer galleries in Australia, and while these were mostly

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[204]At various addresses, mostly in Little Collins Street, until its closure in 1973, the Primrose Pottery Shop offered imported prints, pots and other objects. The MacMillans were very selective in what they chose to sell: they provided encouragement and the possibility of an income for many, and were influential in developing public attitudes to locally made, as well as overseas work.

[205]These magazines included *New Idea* (1902), *Women's World* (1921), *The Home* (1920), *Australian Women's Mirror* (1926), *Art in Australia* (1916), *Australian Women's Weekly* (1933) and *Home Beautiful* (c.1900)

[206]As did the Misses Hirst, Allen and Booth on stations 2GB and 2UW for the Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales in 1931. Caroline Miley records members of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria being involved with radio programs in 1929.

[207]Notanda was later run by Margo Lewers's brother Carl Plate in Rowe Street.

[208]Later run in 1934-35 by Cynthia Reed as Cynthia Reed Modern Furnishings.

[209] Frances Burke established the screenprinting business Burway Prints in 1937, becoming Frances Burke Fabrics in 1942 .

interested in painting, some supported the crafts, particularly pottery, in their early years. Harold Hughan's exhibition at Georges' Gallery in Melbourne in 1950 was the first one-person stoneware pottery exhibition in Australia *(see Plate 8: following page).* Hughan was not to have another for many years; his practice, by contrast, was to have a 'kiln-opening day' at which his work was sold.[210] By the 1960s Les Blakebrough remembers the queues for pots at some of the Macquarie Galleries exhibitions in Sydney, where visitors were given a numbered tag, so they would be sure of a fair turn in the purchasing order.[211]

Locally made crafts were often seen as part of an exotic bohemia, as audiences and customers 'acquired' the lifestyle and philosophy of the makers along with their purchases. Until the redevelopment of central Sydney in the 1960s, the range of shops and galleries in Rowe Street in the 1950s was a focus for everyone interested in the arts and a bohemian way of life. A compilation of nostalgic memories from anyone who was in Sydney at the time, including satirist Barry Humphries who referred to it in one of his shows, describes it as the street of the beatniks, coffee and spaghetti, where the first coloured shirts and corduroy trousers were worn.[212]

An example of dealer galleries and the importance they had in their communities was the Johnstone Gallery in Brisbane from 1952. Denis Pryor observes that when the gallery first opened there was no pottery of any quality being made in Brisbane, and it pioneered the importation of Scandinavian ware, still regarded as 'excessively avant-garde' in Brisbane.

After some unsuccessful shows of Australian pots, Johnstone tried again in 1959 with David and Hermia Boyd, and their exhibition of a thousand pieces of pottery was an 'instant hit'.[213] But it was still early days for professional displays. When potter Milton Moon exhibited his ceramics in the Rudy

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[210]Kenneth Hood, who became a collector of Hughan's work, would take a stool and sit by the front door. 'The Hughans would be besieged in their little house in Glen Iris. People would begin to arrive around twelve o'clock for the opening at two, and would stand around until the doors opened, and surge in. 'HRH' would hide in the pottery or crouch in the house with the blinds down; people would be making excuses and try in all sorts of ways to get in early.' Interview with Kenneth Hood (1986)

[211]Other galleries in Sydney were the Clune, Rudy Komon, and the Hungry Horse galleries. The Barry Stern gallery started in 1959, and in 1963 Ann Von Bertouch opened the Bertouch Gallery in Newcastle.

[212] Margaret Jaye sold work from local potters and from those as far afield as the Potters Cottage at Warrandyte; Anina offered 'modern jewellery, quartzy, chunky and Scandinavian'; Rowe Street Records was 'the best record shop in Sydney'; Carl Plate sold imported prints in his gallery, Notanda; and the Society of Arts and Crafts provided a wide range of work in their shop. Marion Hall Best and Dora Sweetapple, in their interior design showroom, 'were like a honey-pot where we all went on Saturday mornings, and there were a couple of exciting milliner's shops next door'. Interviews with Moira Kerr, Peter Travis, Darani Lewers, 1986-90

[213]Brian Johnstone's first gallery, opened in 1952 in the basement of the Brisbane Arcade, later moving to a suburban gallery in Bowen Hills. Casual openings on Sundays were held in the two cottages, a courtyard and garden. Denis Pryor *Focus on Milton Moon* (1967) 24

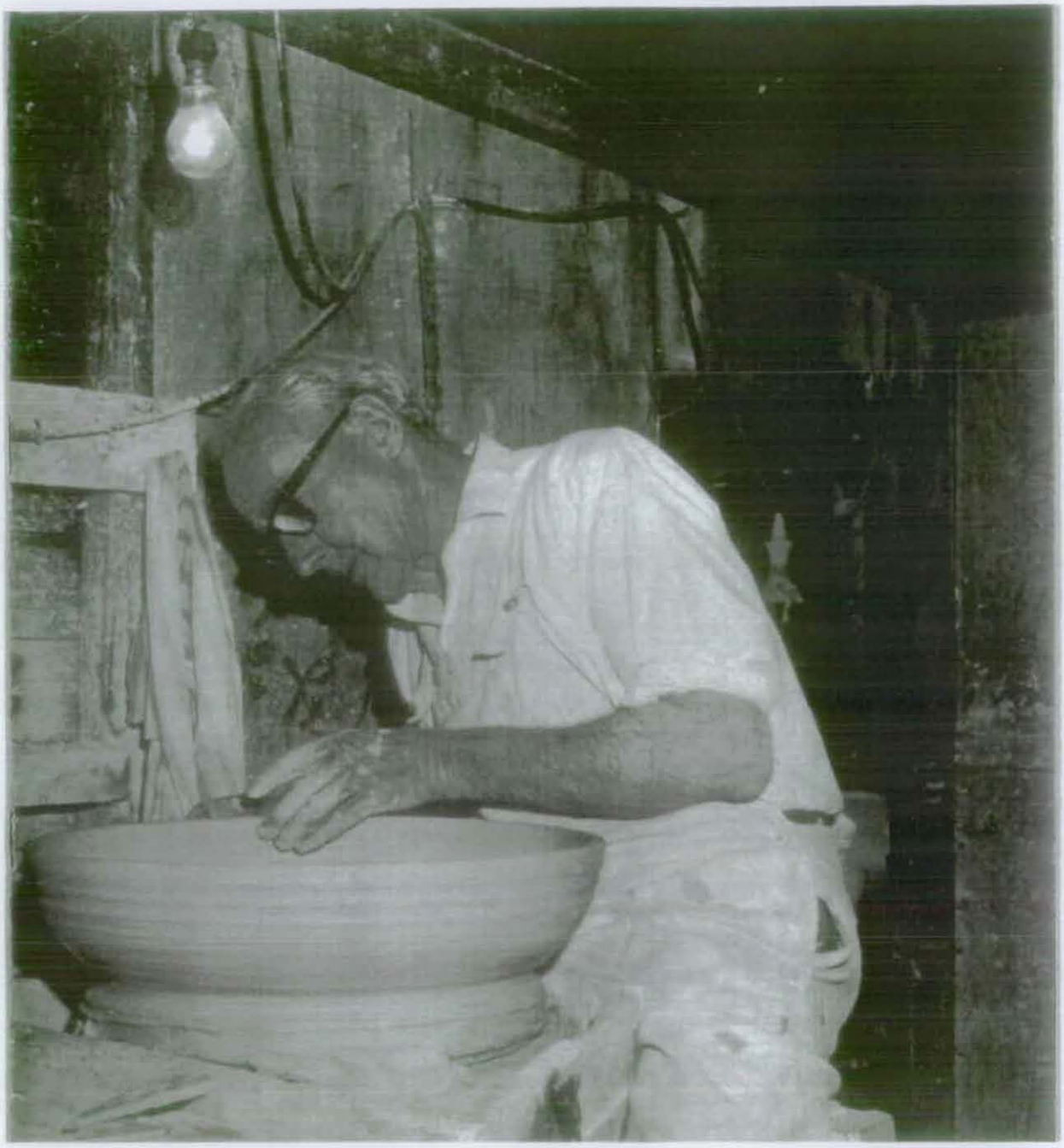

Plate 8: Harold Hughan

(see page 73) In 1969, when this photograph was taken, Harold Hughan's work was 'a revelation even to his most fervent admirers...For art is not a visit to an art gallery or an expensive picture hung on a wall as a status symbol. Neither is it a recreation for the idle or a luxury for the rich. Art either informs the whole of life or it is nothing.' Professor Joseph Burke in Kenneth Hood *Harold Hughan*, catalogue for second retrospective exhibition, 1983.

Harold Hughan's (1893-1987) remarkable career as a potter spanned from 1941 when he made this wheel using the drive-shaft of an abandoned truck, until the mid-1980s when he turned ninety. Influenced by the writings of Bernard Leach, and the Kent collection of Chinese ceramics in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, his first solo exhibition in 1950 was also the first solo exhibition of stoneware pottery in Australia. This photograph was taken for his first retrospective exhibition of 440 pots at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1969, the first potter given an exhibition of this scale, in this art gallery.

Komon Gallery in Sydney in 1962, Robert Hughes commented that: 'Visually Komon's is the least attractive gallery in Sydney. It is also one of the smallest. And so the pottery, jam-packed on ricketty wooden shelves covered with ragged hessian and supported on battered bricks, gives the gallery the look of a rather cheerless jumble sale. To make it worse, the shelves are at knee-level, so that one has to choose between staring down the mouth of a pot, and circumnavigating the room on all fours.'[214]

The fact that a young and aspiring art critic like Robert Hughes was reviewing an exhibition of ceramics at this time is significant. When *Craft Australia* editor April Hersey ran a series of nation-wide seminars to find 'critical writers' for the crafts in 1980, she found that in most centres art critics worked part-time, had dozens of galleries to cover with limited newspaper space and had little financial assistance towards expenses. By comparison, Peter Rushforth recalled that 'when he had begun his life as a potter every newspaper had a critic and that he could expect comments from half a dozen sources in Sydney alone if an exhibition was important enough.'[215]

It seems that by the 1950s the crafts were accepted as a parallel but different activity to the fine arts and design, and valued for being useful objects that also made symbolic connections that audiences at that time valued in relation to a 'crafts' way of life.

Conclusion

The contemporary crafts movement in Australia grew primarily out of the ideals and example of the earlier English Arts and Crafts movement, which had a close relationship with both architects and artists, but also had a strong social purpose.

However, although craftspeople were critical of Modernism, the crafts movement was inevitably influenced from the 1950s by the equally influential modern design developments from, for example, British contemporary design; the effects of the Bauhaus design school and its influential American offshoots and their experimentation with new materials; and in German, Italian and Scandinavian design industries.

By the 1950s there was an acceptance in Australia of the diverse values of practices across art, crafts, design and architecture, and on the valid role of the client or consumer in relation to the designer or maker. Sometimes the social aspects of the crafts bordered on the therapeutic, through both rehabilitation activities as part of war work; sometimes they were somewhat romantic in their invention of 'new traditions' as part of a community endeavour.

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[214]Robert Hughes *Sunday Mirror* 11 November 1962 52, cited in Pryor ibid (1967) 41
[215]April Hersey editorial *Craft Australia* 1980/4 18

The developing movement was central to very serious postwar desires to be more closely involved with the environment and human, rather than industrial, values, through skilled professional practice and a sense of community.

The next chapter will discuss some of the different influences from the 1960s that were to encourage some in the crafts movement to pursue art ideals in their work.

Plate 9: Mark Thompson
(see page 99) *Buy Australian Maid*, high fired clay with enamels and lustres, porcelain flowers, sterling silver wires and kangaroo, braid and velvet, handbuilt in Adelaide in 1977. (h. 65cm)

With a background in painting as well as ceramics, and an interest in stage design, Mark Thompson (b1949) was among the first to successfully work from other ceramic traditions. He drew on the example of porcelain dolls, Meissen figurines and the angels, cherubs and Madonnas of the Italian Renaissance, to make political and social satires. Other titles reflect his interests: *Fetish/Votive Object for the Kingaroy Peanut* commented on the Queensland premier in 1977; *The Martyrdom of Christopher the Unwise* in 1980, with nine circles of naked buttocks, referred to the management of the Adelaide Festival.

Chapter 3:
The crafts as art: a shift in ideology, 1960s and 1970s

This chapter will look at the ways in which the contemporary crafts movement in Australia responded to social changes, and to both contemporary art and design in the 1960s and 1970s. It will show the development within the movement of different ideas about what the crafts and crafts practice might be, and focus on those who began to pursue the ideal of 'craft as art'. It will identify the main source of the change in ideals as the organised international crafts network centred particularly in the United States, and will discuss the ways in which some practitioners sought to pursue art ideals, in the context of changing values in the art world itself.

Introduction

The crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals was not a sudden phenomenon; nor was it something that replaced other ideals completely. It occurred alongside the continuing ideals associated with both traditional practice, as at the Sturt workshops, and design for limited production, like Frances Burke's textile screenprinting business. Nonetheless, by the 1960s, the desire to be an acclaimed expressive individual, with the status of artist or designer, making work that was to be seen to have the status of 'art', whatever its form or function, became increasingly important to many craftspeople.

Most crafts practice from the 1960s, overseas and in Australia, continued to pursue a fairly conventional or 'traditional' course. But historians like Philippe Garner believed that by this time crafts practitioners had become somewhat of a symbol of another age. 'There will always be a role for the handcrafted object', he said, 'but more as a romantic symbol for the rich, than as a viable possibility for everyday use.'[216] British writer Peter Dormer suggests the crafts 'changed class' after the war, being practised by the educated middle class, who made products for aesthetic value rather than practical use. The crafts, he said, 'changed from being working-class or artisan, commercial occupations into middle-class, creative, *art-like* activities. Art-like in the sense that the objects produced are made and bought primarily for contemplation.' Moreover, he continued, 'As soon as people were willing to buy hand-made pots because they liked their look rather than because they were cheap and useful, a trend began whereby craft objects could be sold for their aesthetic content alone.'[217]

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[216]Philippe Garner *Contemporary Decorative Arts, 1940 to the Present Day* (1980) 45

[217]Peter Dormer *The Meanings of Modern Design* (1990) 150, 148

This circumstance had clearly been developing since the late nineteenth century crafts revival, where handcrafted items became products for the rich rather than for the general mass of people, for whom they had been initially intended. However, for many, the ethical ideals remained, and 'a sense of nostalgia, for traditional methods of production rather than for decorative styles from the past, led to a search for new forms which fulfilled the craftsman's criteria of "quality and variety," ' [218] characteristics that had been considerably undermined by industrial manufacture. The crafts also continued to appeal because of their association with criticism of consumerist ideals that linked mass-production with 'progress' and 'development'.

However, a number of key issues in art and design, to be discussed in this chapter, affected the crafts as they were practised from the 1960s and influenced a reorientation of attitudes amongst some practitioners towards the purpose and meaning of their work. One was the strong influence of post-war university education programs in the United States and elsewhere that had placed an emphasis on the expressive development of the individual, and that, in the developing supporting infrastructure of the fine arts, served to increasingly separate artists and their work from society. This view co-incided with the persistence of the 'nineteenth-century success ideology, which held aloft the example of the self-made man', a view that T. J. Jackson Lears insists was always a false world view, despite its traces 'today at all levels of our culture, from the calls for "self-starters" in the want ads to the fascination of ego psychologists with autonomy...'.[219]

Another was the increasing influence of modernist design and attitudes towards the role of designers. In Australia, this influence came through the architecture and design styles that were introduced after the war from Europe and the United States, Scandinavia and Italy. Young architects like Harry Seidler, who was born in Europe and trained in the United States, and the designers who worked with them, had a fresh approach to a consumerist marketplace, and increasingly began to make their names in their field.

Both directions gave the designer or artist a status that was not afforded craftspeople who had been making utilitarian items for the domestic market. The multi-crafts associations that developed in the 1960s and 1970s at local, national and international levels, were formed out of the experiences and wider aspirations of some of the members of existing specialist crafts groups and crafts communities. They began to lobby with a cohesive voice for a new status for the crafts that would be equivalent to that of design and fine art. They discussed their aims in terms of a world crafts fraternity based in tradition - but a fraternity of acclaimed individuals seeking national and international status.

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[218]Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987) 230

[219]T J Jackson Lears *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (1981) 18

Changes in the crafts as a result of art, design and related social influences occurred where those influences first appeared. They arrived in other countries like Australia later, often, but not always, as stylistic imitation rather than as a critical participation in the initial prompting issues. Usually they were adapted and associated with a search for personal and national identity, but in the aims of the organisations of the crafts movement, there remained an increasing, underlying desire to be *professional* and to be *international* - as well as to be Australian.

For many, the path to this desire lay in being like an artist.

A national and international network

A distinctive characteristic of the contemporary crafts movement's desire to be both professional and international was the way it became part of a national and international network, with a 'world' philosophy.[220]

The status given to visual artists, as the network of dealer galleries developed and as connections with the art centres of the world increased, prompted the leaders of the new crafts movement to emulate their institutional and promotional framework. This was a more effective model at the time than that offered by design and industry, although a design infrastructure was also developing.[221]

The World Crafts Council

Quite at odds with the competitive internationalism of mass market consumerism, an international crafts network took shape in the 1960s that had its beginnings in the philanthropic ideals of an American woman, Aileen Webb. Since the years of the Depression Mrs Webb (as she was known) had worked to set up professional crafts organisations in the United States that were to be a model for dozens of countries in the following decades.[222] In 1963 Webb wrote:

> Our century will surely be considered by future historians as that in which practical steps on an international level were first taken to make a working

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[220]Despite its international origins, the Arts and Crafts movement in Australia had been regional in its effect, and subsequent individual crafts practice had similarly been regional because of the lack of national communication. Post-war specialist groups were focused primarily on their own practical needs.

[221]See Michael Bogle *Design in Australia 1880-1970* (1997) for a summary of the development of professional design associations.

[222]Mrs Webb (sometimes identified as Aileen O. Webb, sometimes as Mrs Vanderbilt Webb) established the Handcraft League of America in 1939; America House in New York in 1940; School for American Craftsmen in New Hampshire, early 1940s; the Craftsmen's Educational Council in 1943; American Craftsmen's Council (later American Crafts Council) in 1958; Craft Gallery, later the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (now American Crafts Museum) 1956; also the journal *Craft Horizons*. Obituary for Mrs Webb *Artisan News* Sept/Oct 1979 7

> reality of the ideal of the brotherhood of man. The League of Nations and the United Nations, even the Common Market, are evidence there is a will for greater understanding, a desire among men to live at peace with one another, to establish the structures to make this possible...In this nuclear age, we stand at the threshold of two opposite directions: a new era of humanistic values or the total destruction of those values, past as well as future. The development of mankind has been marked by two forces: the drive of the individual to attain power, and the need of man to live creatively and cooperatively in the society of his fellow man.[223]

Webb's zeal was evangelical: she saw the crafts as an international uniting force, at a time when others were looking for similar uniting links.[224] She wanted to extend the values she associated with the crafts to other countries, and to include in this net the craftspeople in less-developed countries, where both traditional and transitional work was made as a national economic necessity. Towards these ends, she organised, through the American Craftsmen's Council, the First World Congress of Craftsmen, which ran for two weeks at Columbia University in June 1964. Nearly a thousand people attended from the United States and forty-six other countries, and many of the overseas people had been sponsored by Mrs Webb herself. The ensuing organisation, the World Crafts Council (WCC), has held a biennial World Crafts Conference since that time.[225]

Speaking in 1964 to an audience of craftspeople, educators, writers and government representatives, Mrs Webb suggested that the aims of the organisation should be to provide markets for the work of each country's craftsmen (sic), to educate the people of the world in the values of craftsmanship, and to bring this about through proper leadership, in a spirit not of competition but of co-operation.[226]

From the beginning there was always a difference in need and intent between the member countries of the Western world and those of the Third World. While representatives of Western countries tended to be independent craftspeople and representatives of crafts organisations, those of the Third World countries were often trade officials. The difference was clear at the first conference, when American art critic Harold Rosenberg said, 'In the future, [the arts'] major function will be to serve as a means for individual

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[223]Aileen Vanderbilt Webb *Craft Horizons* Jan/Feb 1963 11

[224]For example, Edward Steichen's photographic exhibition Family of Man (1959) 'brought together photographs from all over the world, allegedly in celebration of the universality of human experience, but promoting the "American way of life" and American values.' Anne-Marie Willis *Picturing Australia; a History of Phography* (1988) 218

[225]Mrs Webb's close friend Mrs Margaret Patch took a trip round the world in 1960-61 to lay the groundwork for this conference which set up the WCC. Eventually regional zones were formed, which generally held meetings in the intervening years, and from 1981 the WCC had UNESCO funding status. This was achieved during Australian, Marea Gazzard's, presidency in 1980-84.

[226]Aileen Vanderbilt Webb *Craft Horizons* Sept/Oct 1964 8,9

selfdevelopment - and this will also be the primary aim of the crafts, and ultimately, of all human work'; whereas Patwant Singh, editor of Design Magazine of the Arts in New Delhi, argued:

> So long as certain crafts are vital as a source of employment in countries where unemployment is a pressing problem, they have to be encouraged and sustained. When a point is reached where they are subsidised and kept alive out of nostalgia and romanticist ideas rather than valid economic or aesthetic reasons, it is time for serious examination.[227]

Rose Slivka, editor of the journal *Craft Horizons*, set up by Mrs Webb in the early 1950s, had said of contemporary developments in 1959:

> This is not merely a revival of crafts. This is not a nostalgic return to the handmade object on a wide functioning scale. We are as we must be, irretrievably an industrial society. What has happened is this: the crafts have realised their own distinct, necessary and rightful place in it - not in conflict with it, not absorbed into it - but existing within the larger structure, true to their own identity and to their own continuity...We are not harking back to old methods; we are creating new values in an entirely new situation... [The craftsman] has substituted the world heritage for lack of an indigenous one...Maintenance of control over product from impetus of idea to completion, is a reaffirmation of humanistic relationships - a relationship and responsibility to the object with which he invests his personality, and a relationship and responsibility to the person who uses it.[228]

This view, which was to be largely adopted elsewhere - and indeed, still holds strength as an ideal - was nonetheless influenced by the strong connections between the American Craftsmen's Council and the New York art world. Slivka's personal connections with artists, and art critics of the time like Harold Rosenberg, clearly came to focus her view of the development of crafts traditions in the context of the pursuit of individual artistic freedom and expression.[229]

The WCC was formed at a time when Australian craftspeople were seeking links with one another, and needing to make more contact with others overseas. It not only provided information and first hand experience of other places and other ideas, and important links with people who would come to teach, lecture and bring exhibitions in the 1970s, but also reinforced a common feeling of purpose and value that had a significant effect on the strength of the organised movement which developed in member countries.

The views of this group, as expressed by the influential American writers of this time, were to influence craftspeople and leaders in crafts organisations elsewhere.

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[227]Harold Rosenberg and Patwant Singh *Craft Horizons* Sept/Oct 1964

[228] Rose Slivka *Craft Horizons*, Mar/Apl 1959

[229] The contradictions that were set up between the valuing of tradition crafts and their reinvention in the West, and the ideals of the New York art world, were introduced in Chapter 1, 'The start of the chase'.

The Crafts Councils network in Australia

By the early 1960s in Australia, many craftspeople were aware of the organisational developments in America, subscribed to *Craft Horizons*, and through travel had seen how an organised network or lobby could be successful in other countries.[230] The British Crafts Centre, for example, had been set up in the early 1960s, and this was well known to Australians, as were some of the Scandinavian organisations for crafts-based design, production and marketing.[231]

In the early stages of the development of a national support structure, and through to the late 1970s, this largely amateur movement was led and supported by a very small truly professional core. Their combined efforts provided the basis for a strong lobby, supported by public opinion at a number of levels, that was influential in the development of formal government financial support, the development of courses, the inclusion of their work in galleries and exhibitions, and involvement in an international scene.[232]

Crafts Council of New South Wales, 1964

A national crafts network started in Australia with the establishment of the Craft Association of Australia (New South Wales Branch), in 1964. A number of people in Sydney from various backgrounds, and with various objectives, had felt the need for a multi-craft national organisation. Partly prompting this activity was the letter sent to Marea Gazzard by Mrs Webb inviting a craft representative from Australia to attend the first World Crafts Conference in 1964.

'Really, what we were concerned about', said Marea Gazzard, 'was changing the environment from mediocrity to one of excellence. We wanted to get good people in different fields together so that there would be a cross-fertilisation of stimulation and interest, and more excellent craft would be the result.'[233] Les Blakebrough, a potter who was at that time manager of the

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[230]By this time, a number of potters societies and handweavers and spinners guilds had formed as state and national organisations; other groups, like the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria, provided a regional strength; some courses, such at East Sydney Technical College, or centres such as Sturt, also provided a national focus.

[231]There had been other models for multi-crafts organisations. Les Blakebrough recalls: 'There had been a first meeting of craftspeople outside specialist groups at Dartington Hall in England in about 1952, with Hamada, Leach and Mrs Webb. Dartington Hall had a similar philosophy to Sturt, and was a big influence on the crafts, theatre, ballet - an experiment that would capture anyone's imagination. There was another similar conference in Tokyo in 1959 masterminded by Leach and Hamada, and Mrs Webb went there too. Interview with Les Blakebrough (1986)

[232]For a full account of the histories of the Crafts Council network see Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) Chapters 4 and 7

[233]Marea Gazzard in April Hersey *Women in Australian Crafts* Craft Australia (1975). 'Finding a representative from Australia was not easy. The letter seemed to arrive out of the blue and it was felt that the only representative group in Australia was the Potter's Society.

Sturt workshops, adds 'the nucleus of the Crafts Council came really from the agitation and expansion that a group wanted for the Potters Society...it was a real ferment, but it had a kind of parochialism, a reluctance to take challenges.'[234] From the beginning it was thought that any crafts organisation of real standing must be a national one, and must involve all states.[235] 'There was initially a slight resistance to joining an association,' Gazzard remembered:

> Craftsmen are all very much individuals and I think they felt they might lose their autonomy if they became joiners. The good thing was that right from the beginning the good craftsmen could see how valuable it would be for Australia and we virtually had top people in every field in that first association. We always had this layer of very good professional people involved...[although] we didn't want to be exclusive and élitist...the whole purpose was to have an intermingling of different categories...if we had insisted upon special training and complete professionalism we would have had an organisation of ten people, and what would have been the point of that?[236]

Moira Kerr also recalled that:

> ...there was a great urge at that time to be part of this wider movement, and I think that Mrs Vanderbilt Webb really picked up on a feeling that was simmering not only in the United States, but also in Australia, Europe and Britain. The push of the crafts here was to do with people looking to establish more of a professional base; they were looking for an international levelling; they wanted to be making things like those overseas were making.[237]

Crafts Council of Australia 1971

The urgency for the formation of a national body increased, when it was thought that the new federal arts funding body, the Australian Council for the

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They voted to send Miss Mollie Douglas, and for the first time Australian craft was represented overseas.' Also there in 1964 were Bob Hughan and Mrs Hughan from the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria, Anita Aarons from Caulfield Technical College, and Narelie Townsend, who was a Sydney architect working in New York.

[234]Interview with Les Blakebrough (1986)

[235] In other states, existing groups were invited to be involved in forming an association, and NSW members travelled to speak at public meetings to convince interstate craftspeople of the value of such a national network.

[236]Interview with Marea Gazzard (1986)

[237]Interview with Moira Kerr (1986). Apart from encouraging development of associations in all states, the Craft Association also set out to show Australian work in Australia and abroad. It sent an Australian crafts exhibition to Stuttgart in Germany in 1969 and a selection of work to the Asia and Pacific Council (ASPAC) exhibition in New Zealand in 1970. Their first overseas exhibition in Australia was the batik of Irwan Tirta Amidjaya, from Indonesia, in 1968. Biennial exhibitions were established, the first at the Design Centre in Bridge Street in 1967.

Arts, might include support for the crafts as well.[238] One of the stipulations for the proposed funding of any national body was that it be representative of all states, so efforts increased in 1970 to establish the last few state Craft Associations. The Crafts Council of Australia, set up in 1971 as a national body, was made up of delegates from states. As well as co-ordinating these national connections, the council maintained links with other countries the World Crafts Council. It also published the journal *Craft Australia* from 1971, co-ordinated national projects like touring exhibitions and itineraries for international visitors, embarked on a number of research and lobby projects and set up a resource centre in 1976.

State Crafts Councils

Following the formation of the Craft Association of NSW in 1964, craft associations were eventually established in all states and territories.[239] While there were regional differences, all councils embarked immediately on exhibition programs and published newsletters. One of the major objectives was to provide, through workshops with local and international professionals, education and training experiences that were not available in teaching institutions. They developed registers of craftspeople, guides to shops and galleries, lists of suppliers and calendars of events. Every association also became involved in major public participatory events that served not only to promote their own work, but also to introduce it to others. Craft Happenings, Summer Schools, school holiday events and craft demonstrations in public places, agricultural shows and craft markets were all part of the program. By the 1980s a number of other institutions, including art schools, galleries, libraries, magazines and small artists collectives, had taken a lead from the councils and had incorporated some council-initiated activities into their own programs.

The council network was very aware of what was occurring overseas; funding from the Australia Council from 1973 allowed contact with overseas visitors and exhibitions never before possible; and the differing and changing ideals of crafts practice were to be increasingly disseminated through the efficient and wide-reaching network.

The influence of art

The development of crafts practice as a movement was especially influenced

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[238]Australian Council for the Arts, established in 1969; reformed to include a Crafts Board (and others) in 1973; renamed the Australia Council in 1975; and the Australia Council for the Arts in the 1980s.

[239]Formation of Craft Associations: South Australia, 1966; Western Australia 1968; Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and ACT 1970; Northern Territory 1973. From 1973, with the formation of the Crafts Board of the Australian Council for the Arts, the state Craft Associations (or Councils as they were called after 1978), were separately eligible for financial support, but increasingly from state governments as well.

by what was happening in the visual arts, particularly the ways in which art was marketed and the status it commanded. There were two clear and contradictory art influences on the crafts during the 1960s and 1970s: celebrating the object and then rejecting it.

Celebrating 'the expressive object'

After the war, the perceived centre of the international art world had shifted from Paris to New York, partly because so many European artists moved there, but also because America represented freedom and independence. New York's position in the art world was reinforced by the establishment of powerful art critics, and the development of an influential dealer-gallery system with its associated development of wealthy private patronage of contemporary art.

As an example of this freedom, the bold gestures of the painting movement Abstract Expressionism emphasised the physical, personal expression of the artist. This movement, which had appeared first in New York in the 1940s, 'flourished', said Edward Lucie-Smith, 'in the soil already fertilized by the Surrealist immigration during the war. The stress was on truth to one's own psyche, and on innovation without reference to anything which had happened previously.'[240] The concerns of Abstract Expressionism for process almost as a ritual, and its use of unconventional techniques such as pouring, splashing and dribbling paint - later associated with modernist 'organic free-form' styling in design - were to have a strong effect on the attitudes of crafts practitioners in furniture, ceramics, glass, jewellery and textiles.

By the early 1960s Abstract Expressionist painting in the United States was giving way to other mid-century modernist 'movements'. One was identified in the paintings of what became known as Hard-Edge Abstraction, Colorfield and Post-Painterly Abstraction, which were championed by critics such as Clement Greenberg. Here, 'modern art was obsessed with the specificity of painting, with its flatness, its saturation, its colour composition, [and] its emotional depth corresponding to the presumed emotions of the painter.'[241] This 'formalist dialectic of the New York School'[242] encouraged the 'autonomy' of art works that had little reference other than to themselves. As well, with the influence of sculptors like Anthony Caro in England and David Smith in the United States, both the convention of using pedestals and their association with producing heroic monuments were increasingly abandoned as sculptors sought instead, to make three-dimensional works that 'articulated'

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[240]Edward Lucie-Smith *Cultural Calendar of the 20th Century* (1979) 118

[241]Sandy Nairne *State of the Art* (1987) 25

[242]Norma Broude 'Miriam Shapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth Century Art' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrad (ed) *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) 315

space as kinetic sculpture, mobiles, junk assemblages, and installations of industrially-manufactured components.[243]

In the United States, the crafts, fostered in a university education context that encouraged the critical assessment of tradition and convention in art and design, had been working out notions of Modernism alongside these art movements. The modernist ideals of art as an act of individual personal expression, and of an artwork as an 'avant-garde' autonomous object detached from an audience or a context, were the key elements that influenced a change for some crafts practitioners in their pursuit of a cultural status equivalent to art, and towards providing the crafts world with an 'art' rationale for its own practice.

Those, for example, who had worked around ceramic artist Peter Voulkos at the Otis Art Institute in the United States in the mid-fifties, rejected the prevailing romanticism of the crafts revival. They sought, as Garth Clark and Margie Hughto observe, a contemporary vocabulary influenced also by jazz, the beat poets, and a Zen aesthetic as it had been introduced to them by Bernard Leach and the 'general climate of urgency following the war'. Clay was treated by those such as Voulkos and his student Paul Soldner as simply 'another expressive material'.[244] They were translating into ceramic practice the ideology of the Abstract Expressionist painters.

Also influential was the subversive movement that emerged in California in the late 1960s as Funk ceramics. 'Funk' art, as Clark and Hughto point out, had its roots in Dada and Surrealism in art and surfaced in ceramics with Robert Arneson in 1962, who 'placed a ceramic cap on a "handsomely-thrown bottle" and marked it *no return*'. He and his students at the University of California at Davis began to explore Funk ceramics making objects that were figurative, funny, surreal and sometimes objectionable:

> ...as an alternative to both the cool, mannered Pop Art and the so-called Abstract Expressionist ceramics that were being referred to ...as "the blood-and-guts school"...the impact was enormous, fashionably but superficially seen as the ceramic hippiedom; it was linked with the youth protest movement that had emerged at the same time.[245]

The work of people experimenting in these ways was picked up by collectors[246] and discussed in the terms of the art world of the time; 'a broad-ranging experiment taking craft to the point that the critic Harold Rosenberg proposed as the ideal for contemporary art, an unfocussed play with

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[243]See for example, Edward Lucie-Smith op cit (1979) 154

[244]See Garth Clark and Margie Hughto *A Century of Ceramics in the United States 1878-1978* (1979) 129

[245]Clark and Hughto ibid (1979) 160, 163

[246]Collectors such as Fred and Mary Mahrer whose Funk ceramic collection came to Australia in the 1970s.

materials'.[247] Other sculptural ceramic work was also being made, ranging from the stylistic modern forms of Hans Coper in England, to what Clark and Hughto called the 'art of the clean' in America, where immaculately crafted 'fetish finish' works appeared, from the early 1960s, using white-ware rather than stoneware, and often decorated with china painting techniques.

With the development, or adaptation, in the United States in the early 1960s of glass-making technology that allowed artists to work on their own or as small groups in a studio, rather than in a factory, glass production also tended to follow an expressive rather than a functional direction, and was influenced by the 'organic' design ideals of the time. Glass-blowers such as Sam Herman, who followed the 'pioneers' Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino in America, and who was to set up the Jam Factory workshops in Adelaide in 1974, made expressive, free-form, functional and sculptural works *(see Plate 10: following page, for an example of a return to skilled traditions).* 'The freedom of this compared with the formal "designed" work of Europe,' said Michael Esson, writing in a catalogue for an international glass exhibition in Australia in 1982, 'was spontaneous and refreshing, seducing audience and glassmakers alike.'[248]

Also to seek the validation of the art world were those working in textiles, particularly weaving. Although the sources for new work were diverse, the relationship to the ideals of Expressionism and 'art' was identified from the 1950s. Some weavers, like Magdalena Abakanowicz and Ewa Jaroszynska (later Pachucka), had studied sculpture in Poland but within an awareness of a Polish textile history, which in the 1950s had been part of the Polish government's program to restore skills in 'native handcrafts'. A logical progression was to combine both, and their work moved towards free sculptural weaving, in forms that were seen first at the 1957 Milan Triennale, and at the 1958 Brussels World Fair. At the same time there was an interest in new weaves and textures associated with the pre-war revival and development of modern tapestry in France through artists such as Jean Lurçat, who in 1962 established the Lausanne Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie (woven tapestry).

Weavers and writers Jack Lenor Larsen and Mildred Constantine, in particular, were influential in the United States in encouraging the development of what they called the Art Fabric, through publications, and through a number of exhibitions that included Art Fabrics amongst industrial and fashion fabrics.[249] The new development in textile art took a number of forms. One was the wall hanging, which was often monumental in size, abstract in design and form, usually made from natural materials, and often

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[247]Clark and Hughto op cit (1979) 134, 138

[248]Michael Esson *International Directions in Glass Art* catalogue (1982) 23

[249]Larsen & Constantine's exhibitions started with Textiles USA, Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) 1956

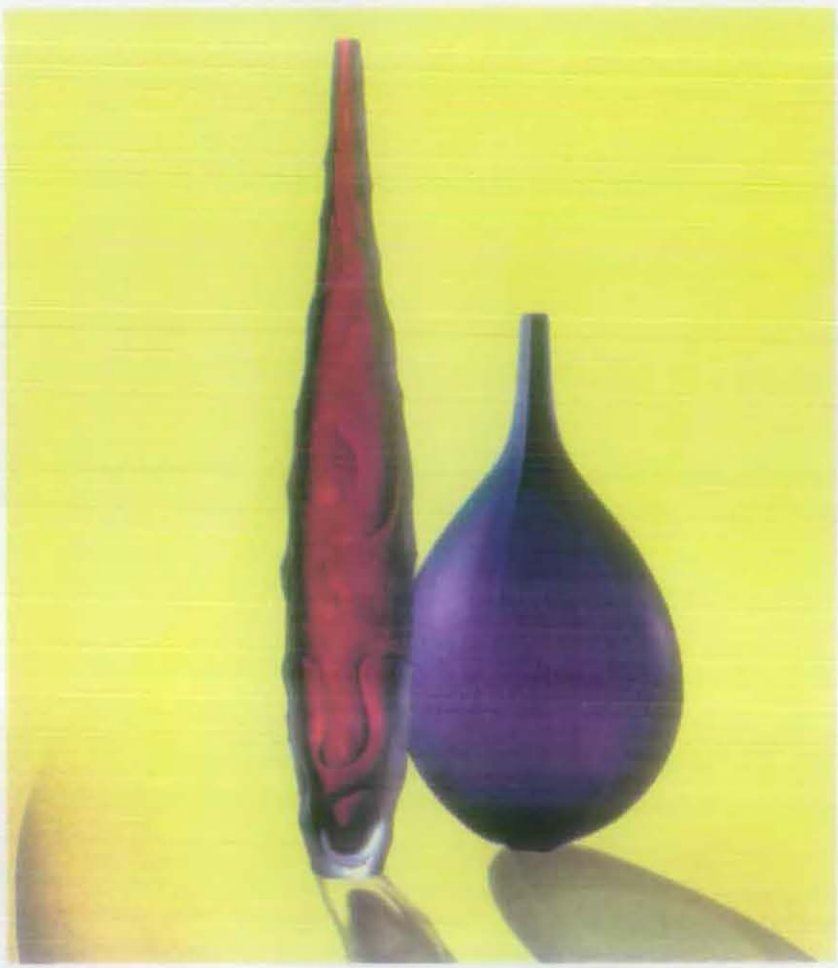

Plate 10: Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott
(see page 86) Two bottles, *Unravelled* and *Undulating*, blown by Ben Edols and wheel-carved by Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott in Sydney in 1997. (tallest 75 x 11cm)

'Studio-glass', as against factory production, appeared in Australia from the early 1970s, following the American expressionist lead. This espoused an organic, free-form aesthetic that (apart from reflecting the limited control that practitioners had over their materials and equipment) also celebrated the expressive autonomy of the individual.

By the 1990s new generations of glass artists, like Ben Edols (b.1967) and Kathy Elliott (b.1964), both well-educated and widely-travelled, were returning to Italian traditions of working in teams, and re-valuing vessel forms. Both of these practices had, to a large extent, been seen as contrary to the idea of the autonomous, individual expressive artist.

hung 'in the round'. Larsen and Constantine linked these works aesthetically with the environmental installations and events of artists such as John Cage and John Segal. By the early 1970s Constantine and Larsen concluded that:

> ...it can be claimed with assurance that these are works of art. The artists who create with fiber have united creativity and intuition, principles and skills to form an aesthetic entity. They have moulded and extended the meaning of their medium and transcended technique and materials; they have liberated their work from tradition and thus heightened their recognition by critics and public...Their works have gained status throughout the world, and while this art form may be in search of nomenclature, it demands and deserves autonomy.[250]

Perhaps more than any of the other crafts, jewellery and gold and silversmithing had identified and reinforced distinctions of class, gender, religion, wealth and status, through their prestigious functions, symbolic images and the use of precious metals and stones. Apart from the continued production of conventional commercial works, the strongest contemporary influences in jewellery and metalwork overseas in the early 1960s had been those of the restrained forms from Scandinavia and Germany, sometimes using non-precious metals like stainless steel. One of the first to provide a different direction was the jeweller and metalsmith Andrew Grima, who opened his first shop in London in 1966. His ideas came from natural textures and patterns such as from crystalline structures or rock formations; an 'organic' style compatible with the aesthetic of the time.

When social distinctions were being questioned and overturned in the late 1960s, jewellers were among the first to be involved in a reassessment of the social purpose of their products. They were influenced by Pop Art and by changes in fashion. By the 1970s a number of jewellers were experimenting with non-precious materials, and questioning traditions of construction and the values associated with wearing jewellery - a line of questioning that had parallels with many in the fine arts who were seeking acknowledgement for community art, and using art (through, for example, badges, banners and posters) as a subversive activity. New materials like acrylic, new extravagant forms like huge collars, and the use of photography to promote and display works were characteristic of the changes. This work was exposed in a number of new specialist dealer galleries in England and Europe, which provided not only a forum where travelling Australians could see jewellery, but also one where they could eventually show their own.[251]

Rejecting 'the object': redefining 'art'

Ironically, just as part of the crafts world was beginning to adopt the autonomy

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[250]Jack Lenor Larsen and Mildred Constantine *Beyond Craft: the Art Fabric* (1973) 7

[251]For example, Galerie Sierraad in Amsterdam, 1969; Electrum Gallery in London, 1971; the Pforzheim Schmuckmuseum in Germany.

of the personally expressive 'non-functional art-craft object' as an ideal, visual artists started to abandon the object as an artform.

By the early 1970s, despite its opposition to the market by virtue of being 'avant-garde', modernist art had become commodified. The market infrastructure of the capitalist economy that supported their work was no longer acceptable to many visual artists.[252] In New York, and later in countries like Australia, they sought to remove themselves and their work from galleries. Reassessment of Modernism in the visual arts centred on the roles and relationships of artists, galleries, viewers and audiences, and markets, and by implication the place of the object, content, intent, meaning, materials and processes in the production of artwork.

Making an art object was not now the ideal: the emphasis was placed on the concept of the work or the artist's idea, and the viewers could participate in this idea rather than own it. By the mid-1970s an astonishing range of radical art practices was carried out in Australia, still influenced by overseas trends. Conceptual art, 'happenings', earthworks, body art, installations, performances and other ephemeral or temporary works, were often combined with experimental music and theatre.[253] Artworks included the use of found objects, objects in the environment, body mutilation, ritual, text, photographs and non-art materials.

Writing in 1976, critic Kenneth Coutts-Smith discussed the fundamental changes that were taking place in collective thinking about the role and function of art. 'From the end of the nineteenth century until a few years ago', he said:

> ...the modern mainstream of art remained a more or less homogenous whole, and the social role of art appeared reasonable well-defined. It echoed, above all, an optimistic and expansive view of bourgeois material life and society, awarding it a "spiritual" justification. The symbolist and expressionist tradition confirmed the romantic and individualistic concept of men and women asserting their personal egos in the face of both society and the cosmos, while at the same time competing with one another.

Coutts-Smith noted in the increasing dematerialisation of the physical presence of art in the previous decade a parallel breakdown of bourgeois confidence and optimism, where 'the bourgeoisie...bitterly condemn the artists for their heresy, and are deeply shocked that culture now appears to be failing *their* myths, myths so necessary for their own identity and justification.' He believed that, blinded by a self-validating system, 'the art subculture's sense of its own identity has subsumed and overlain its awareness of society as a

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[252]See Charles Merewether, Ann Stephen (eds) *The Great Divide* (1977)

[253]Drawing on some of these experiences, George Gittoes and Martin Sharp established the Yellow House in Kings Cross in Sydney in the early 1970s as a centre of psychedelic art, design and performance.

whole'.[254] He criticised art that was separated from society and advocated that 'if we are to develop an art that will restore dignity to the human individual...then we must develop an art that will echo the lived realities of our time, that will assist in the transformation of our society.'[255]

Along these lines, 'community art' developed as one of the forms of art activism, as more artists became disillusioned with the perceived élitism of the art world and the art market. Those involved in the community arts movement in Australia 'believed that creativity was an essential tool to any kind of radical struggle,'[256]and worked towards revaluing the making of art in different cultural, social and working backgrounds, often to effect social change, and alter attitudes about cultural values. Some artists worked with the unionised labour movement, through Art In Working Life projects in all artforms.[257] Many retained a personal practice as well, but saw their involvement as artists working with communities as a different but valid professional activity, producing different but nonetheless valid work. Community arts activities occurred in all art forms, in the form of group efforts like murals, community tapestries, poster and photography projects, and through happenings, workshops, events, festivals and performances.

Much of the new art was associated with redefining content, and many artists started to make work that addressed 'social comment'. The women's art movement of the mid-1970s was crucial, among a number of groups, in exposing the white, male orientation of art, in both the content of the work and the infrastructure that reinforced it. Women artists demanded validation for different, often domestic materials, different content and different language. They also reviewed art history, looking at historical biases against women and the crafts they practised, and, with political intent, sometimes adopted the materials, processes and functions of traditional and domestic crafts in their work. Rozsika Parker, for example, who wrote *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, 'wanted to know how embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another, characterised as mindless, decorative and delicate...good to look at, adding taste and status, but empty of much meaning'.[258] She found that over

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[254]Kenneth Coutts-Smith 'Theses on the Failure of Communication in the Plastic Arts' *Praxis: Journal of Radical Perspectives on the Arts* No 3 1976 78-79

[255]Kenneth Coutts-Smith ibid (1976) 93-94

[256]Owen Kelly *Community, Art and the State, Storming the Citadels* (1984) 1, 11; See also Paul Taylor *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980* (1984)

[257] In 1985 the publication *Working Art,* produced in association with the Art Gallery of New South Wales's exhibition Project 49, surveyed the art in the labour movement in Australia in the 1980s, as well as the historic involvement of the union movement in arts activities. The Australian Council for Trade Unions had developed an arts and creative recreation policy in 1980, and working with the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, held an Art in Working Life Conference in 1981.

[258]Rozsika Parker in *The Subversive Stitch* (foreword, exhibition catalogue) (1988) 5

centuries, embroidery had been both a source of pleasurable creativity and of oppression, and yet also, had been often subversively political.

From the early 1970s artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro led women's art movements in the United States that used 'women's' materials, forms and decorative motifs, and domestic crafts processes, to expose the male biases of the mainstream art world. They wanted women's 'crafts' to be seen equally as art, and used craft techniques on works that they placed in a fine arts context. Chicago, for example, worked to bring knowledge of women's culture and history to a wide audience through art projects like *The Dinner Party* of 1974.[259]

In Australia, the Women's Art Movement (WAM), took form in Sydney in the summer of 1973-74, associated with feminist critic Lucy Lippard's visit to Australia and New Zealand during International Women's Year in 1975.[260] Issues raised by artists in this movement centred on questions of representation, content and imagery, gender-based language, social roles and the sexual division of labour. They looked at the unequal ways in which women were represented in exhibitions, publications, employment (particularly in leadership positions), in servicing the arts and in receiving grant moneys. They consciously explored ideas associated with materials and processes traditionally associated with women's work; earlier domestic crafts were revalued as a political statement by contemporary artists. They also explored what they saw as explicit female issues and concerns as content in their work.

Influential art exhibitions of works exemplifying the new directions in art came to Australia from overseas and others were mounted within Australia; new dealer galleries were established; and by the early 1970s the Sydney Biennale and the Mildura Sculpture Triennial became important exhibition events for new work and new ideas. Nonetheless, said Terry Smith of the fine arts in 1974, 'New York remains the sole judge of who gets to play, of how one plays, and of who wins...If one accepts this system, its rewards can be attractive: a sense of being deeply tested, of lining up against the best from everywhere, of believing that one's acts count within art and the whole culture... [but] as long as strong metropolitan centers like New York continue

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[259]For example, Judy Chicago *Through the Flower* (1977)

[260] The Women's Art Movement (WAM) started when a group including Barbara Hall, Vivienne Binns, Joan Grounds, Jude Adams, Toni Robertson and others started to meet to address issues of discrimination and mutual support. A Women's Art Movement group was set up in Melbourne in 1975, while the South Australian Women's Art Movement started at a meeting in the Experimental Art Foundation in the Jam Factory Building in August 1976. Women at the time were also responding to the issues raised in publications like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1971, and the political focus that was being given through organisations such as the Women's Electoral Lobby from 1972. A Women in Media Conference had also been held in 1972.

to define the state of play, and other centers continue to accept the rules of the game, all the other centers will be provincial, ipso facto.'[261]

Not only were the crafts in a 'provincial' relationship to the fine arts at this time, in seeking to acquire an equivalent status to them, but the fine arts themselves, in Australia, were trying to seek their own identity in relation to powerful 'international' forces.[262]

The influence of design

Many in the developing crafts movement aspired, simultaneously, to the ideals of contemporary designers who, by this time, were also achieving the status of artists, as independent expressive individuals making their own statements, albeit on projects that might have a social purpose. While not necessarily wanting to be part of industry, and indeed there were few industries in Australia to design for, there were many craftspeople who wanted to maintain a connection with function and form - and society - within a modern context.

Design itself was also strongly influenced by art, especially sculptural forms like those of Henry Moore, and kinetic sculpture that featured flat planes linked with fine lines. Among the most notable influences in Australia from the 1950s and 1960s was the expressive style of Organic Modernism from the United States, where designers used new technologies and new materials like plastics to make furniture. Also influential were the various spare and functional contemporary Scandinavian, Italian and British product design styles and their architectural counterparts. These contemporary styles developed in the later 1960s as a more homogeneous International Modern style, which also incorporated aspects of Japanese aesthetics like the use of natural materials and a simple ordering of objects and spaces.

British style was reinforced by enterprises like Terence Conran's Habitat shops, first opened in 1964 to bring 'good taste' to the mass market. Successful crafts-based design appeared mostly from Scandinavian workshops, where artist/designer/craftspeople not only designed for production, but also worked as artists in factory studios. Designers in Sweden also put their energies into designing products for social use - for the elderly, the disabled and for the workplace. There was, in their ideology, an interest in the use of natural materials and the maintenance of a sympathetic relationship with the environment.[263] In Scandinavia, through association with the

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[261] Terry Smith 'The Provincialism Problem' *Artforum* September 1974, cited in Paul Taylor (ed) *Anything Goes* (1984); 48, 49

[262] By the Sydney Biennale of 1979, 'European Dialogue', artists demonstrated for equal representation of Australian artists, and of women artists.

[263] Advocating 'design for need', writers like such as Vance Packer, Ralph Nader, Alvin Toffler and Victor Papanek in the 1960s and 70s called for more moral and social responsibility in the design of products for mass consumption. See Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987) 234

development of modern furniture, and 'natural' interiors, there was a revival of traditional rya weaving, and of damasks in new colours and new fibres. From about 1966 the Kilkenny Workshops in Ireland developed from the Scandinavian example as an important design workshop that became a model for similar developments in Australia in the 1970s.[264]

The Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen and his wife, designer Loja Saarinen, had moved to the United States in 1925, and had set up the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1926. Loja directed the weaving studios there, and their work was noticed by those in America who identified links in intent with the practices of Abstract Expressionism. These efforts were reinforced by increasing interest in American Indian and Pre-Colombian basketry and fabrics. It was through these connections that the woven work of Colombian weaver Olga de Amaral, who was also influential in Australia, was associated with the new expressive textile movement.[265]

The fashion world of the 1960s also reflected changing social and aesthetic notions of value, status and symbolism, and indirectly influenced jewellery and aspects of the textile crafts. Fashion in the sixties was largely directed towards the affluent young: clothing was greatly influenced by Pop Art and design and was designed as body adornment, often making symbolic statements and worn with theatrical effect. Some designers used unfamiliar materials like metal and plastic as well as synthetic fibres to meet a demand for designs that were modern, popular, space-age and accessible.

In the 1950s and 1960s people travelled more than ever before, and 'primitive' or 'ethnic' art and artefacts from out-of-the-way places became an important source of ideas and techniques, and a symbolic part of the 'alternative life-style'. Embroidery held:

> ...a special place in counter-cultures and radical movements...For the hippy era, embroidery symbolised love, peace, colour, personal life and rejection of materialism. Everything in fact that embroidery and femininity had connoted since the nineteenth century...For men, long hair and embroidered clothing constituted a rebellious gesture against a hierarchical, puritanical, masculine establishment.[266]

The jeans, ethnic fabrics and embroidery of the international hippie style was also appropriated by high fashion houses in what style commentator Tom Wolfe described as Funky Chic.[267]

Pop Art, which originated in Britain in the late fifties and followed soon after in the United States,[268] and Hard-Edge painting, with their use of bright

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[264]See Chapter 4 'Crafts centres' for further discussion of the Kilkenny Workshops.

[265]*Craft Horizons* May/June 1967 29

[266]Rozsika Parker in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) 206

[267]See Tom Wolfe 'Funky Chic' in *Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine* Picador 1990 174-190

primary colours and bold shapes, greatly influenced the industrial design and fashion industries. In return, the industrial processes, materials and images of mass production were used by painters and sculptors. As it was translated to product design, Pop Art was an expression of recognition of the need for personal symbolic identification and expression: the form-follows-function ethic, in its 'revolt against deceitful distinctions,'[269] had not been fun. The Anti-Design movement in Italy, influenced by Pop, and also by Dada and Surrealism, worked through architectural groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio in the late 1960s. Their projects:

> ...set out to ridicule the economic and cultural status quo and move towards a set of alternative premisses on which to base the definition of design...with overt references...to 'bad taste', nostalgia, eclecticism and popular styling as a means of undermining both the aesthetic and the ethic...of Modernism, and 'good taste'.[270]

As well, the small scale of Italian industry as extensions of family-owned craft shops enabled a flexibility where design changes could be made, and risks taken.

At this time, design practice, itself, was influenced by the art world: not only through colours, motifs and materials as in the relationship between Pop art and design, but in that 'designed' products came to be sometimes identified, like art objects, as the independent creation of the designer, isolated from market forces and production issues. Some designers became international 'names', and craftspeople identified with the status value of design as well as its social function.

'But', as Adrian Forty points out, criticising the dependence of design on art values in this way, 'calling industrial design "art" suggests that industrial designers occupy the principal role in production, a misconception which effectively severs most of the connections between design and society'.[271]

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[268]Pop Art was practised by such artists as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg using the familiar images of consumer society, non-traditional processes, and often 'found' materials.

[269]Mark Brutton *Design* 368 August 1979, discussing the way in which designers had disguised utilitarian products with decorative features.

[270]Penny Sparke *An Introduction to design and Cukture in the Twentieth Century* (1986) 200. This Anti-Design movement was to develop in the late 1970s through studios associated with Italian designers like Ettore Sottsass and Alessandro Mendini that sought, among other things, an aesthetic that would ally mass culture with high culture, providing the elements of a visual style that became associated in the 1980s with what was to be called Postmodernism.

[271]Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire* (1986) 7. He was criticising Stephen Bayley's view that industrial art was the design of the twentieth century, in *In Good Shape: Style in Industrial Products 1900 to 1960* (1979) 10

movement, and within all media, it was evident that influences from elsewhere were taking effect, and that acceptance by the art world had increasingly become the measure of greatest value.

This shift had been encouraged and reinforced through the American philosophies and practices documented in the American journal *Crafts Horizons*, as well as the programs of the British Crafts Centre and the Crafts Advisory Council in the United Kingdom. The 1973 exhibition, The Craftsman's Art, for example, sponsored by the new Crafts Advisory Council and held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, reinforced the swing away from a connection with design and industry towards handmade craftworks whose material was subordinate to the artist's expressive intentions.

Fifteen years later, its curator, John Houston, talked about the influence of art at that time, when craftspeople 'had to face up to the problems of not being painters or sculptors, but not being industrialists either.' They were '...trying to evolve an aesthetic which is to do with the way you make objects, and which allows a teapot to be as expressive as a piece of sculpture the same size.' However, he pointed out that changes were evolutionary:

> The idea of sculpture as we know it today is about 800 or 900 years old. Nine hundred years ago, sculpture was something which was a pillar in Chartres cathedral. It has taken a long time to slither down the pillar, walk across the grass, hop on a plinth, fall off the plinth, become a situation and move into the landscape. It's a real evolution and not just with hindsight. That piece of sculpture really means different things at different times, and the crafts, as we know them, have only existed for a hundred years. In that time they have changed a great deal; if you look at a Morris tapestry and compare it with the work of a tapestry weaver now, the makers's hopes of what that tapestry will mean to you will be quite different.[272]

While the modernist ideals of art were pervasive within the crafts world, those very ideals were at the same time being challenged within the art world by new questions of access to the arts. The shift by some craftspeople in the early 1970s towards art ideals and 'craft-as-art', was also affected by some of the broader cultural issues of the time.

Crafts and the community

Craftspeople, for example, were also involved in some of the projects encouraged by the community arts movement. From the beginning, members of crafts organisations had made themselves available at markets, festivals, conferences and other public places, to sell and demonstrate their work and talk about it, with the objective, not only to make a living, but to encourage others to involve themselves.

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[272]John Houston in Saskia Baron, interview 'A Classic Case' *Crafts* Sept/Oct 1988 25

While this was not understood to be 'community art' at that early stage, it was a clear attempt to encourage the use of these activities as a means of promoting collective and individual expression. In these contexts, crafts events were philosophically close to a radical counter-art movement in the art world, although they were more associated with community expression (like community tapestries) than radical statements, other than banners for trade unions. Many specific participatory events were organised by the various crafts organisations, including 'happenings' (using the art term for these events), 'spin-ins' and 'entanglements' in public places.[273]

Like many visual artists, some craftspeople also confidently used the medium and tradition of their work to demonstrate or explore a political position within the community: works that made 'social comment'.[274] But many did not want to work in this way - nor did they need to - their work was not about political issues, even if their own position in the artworld (for example as people working within women's traditions) may have been seen to be political.

The challenge of the women's movement

As social changes occurred, new questions challenged some of the comfortable assumptions of the crafts movement. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was central to changes in attitude in the visual arts, through drawing attention to the marginalisation not only of women and 'women's art', but, by association, of other groups - like those in the crafts movement - that had not been part of 'the mainstream'.

But within the Australian crafts movement it was not recognised at first that patriarchal language served to distinguish the amateur (as female) from the professional (as male), and art (as what men do) from craft (as what women do). The words artist, performer, dancer, musician, painter and sculptor are all gender-less, as are weaver, jeweller and potter, but the crafts world at that stage identified its makers as 'craftsmen'and 'master-craftsmen'. Like the terms 'chair' and 'chairperson', which the Australia Council and the Australian Broadcasting Commission started to use in the late 1970s, the new words 'craftsperson', 'craftspeople' or 'craftsworker' at first sounded clumsy and unfamiliar, and people claimed the old terms had been used so long that they were now neutral. However, the women's movement provided a mass of

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[273]Examples include 'entanglements' in Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens, the participatory activities in Elder Park during Festival Week in Adelaide, the Easter Arts Embassy in Darwin, Sunday in the Park in Canberra and Crafts in the Park in Sydney. Spin-ins and craft-ins (taking their title from 'love-ins' and 'sit-ins' characteristic of the time), sewing-events and tiled pathways were all early examples of such initiatives co-ordinated by the crafts councils.

[274] Mark Thompson's painted porcelain figures satirised art politics in Adelaide; Sandra Taylor and Margaret Dodd made ceramic forms that questioned myths of Australian lifestyle; and Pru La Motte challenged sexual relations in her tapestries.

statistical information that showed that such terms indisputably altered people's perceptions of themselves, and thus affected other social and economic relationships.[275]

Some aspects of the crafts were 'adopted' by the visual arts as part of their review and critique of art values.[276] Earlier domestic crafts like quiltmaking and embroidery were also revalued as a political statement. In Sydney for example, The D'oyley Show was put together as a collection by the Women's Domestic Needlework Collective, and opened (to criticism from male artists bearing placards) at Watters Gallery in 1979. Sculpture departments in some art schools in Australia, responded in the late seventies and early eighties by accommodating three-dimensional fabric objects as 'soft sculpture', beside other sculptural practices.

Few women in the crafts were initially involved in these efforts. They were more interested in making their work than in using it to debate their position. In Adelaide, discussing the activities of the W.A.M. (the Women's Art Movement) in 1980, visual artist Cath Cherry acknowledged: 'I guess the difference between Art and Craft is either you get better at your skill or you become interested in ideas and concepts, which incorporate much more than the actual practical object that you are working on'.[277] But some craftspeople, like Pru La Motte (formerly Medlin), working in tapestry weaving, and Margaret Dodd, working in clay to make her *This Woman is not a Car* series, also in Adelaide, were in fact, central to the development of works that used the process and history of the media in which they worked to critique the status of women and women artists.

In the crafts movement, La Motte and Vivienne Binns were two of the most vocal advocates for change. Prompted by a *National Times* article in 1978, which noted that 'Australia's élite craftsmen - it's leading potters - are a worried group of men...they see hobbyists getting the grants; they blazed the trail for the craftsmen, but now think women run the show,'[278] La Motte commented on the sexism of the potters interviewed, her views summarising the concerns of the time.[279] She argued that the Crafts Council newsletters

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[275] See Annette Van den Bosch 'What is the Situation for Women Working in the Visual Arts?' *Art Network* Summer (1983). See also the Australia Council's reports *Women and the Arts* and *The Artist in Australia Today* (1980s)

[276] Women artists like Annie Newmarch and Anne Marsh in Adelaide consciously explored ideas associated with the materials and processes traditionally associated with women's work, and used these forms to explore feminist responses to, for example, motherhood, war and sexuality.

[277] Cath Cherry 'The Women's Art Movement' in *Women's Movement: South Australia* Experimental Art Foundation (1980) 54

[278] Report: *National Times* 2 June 1978

[279] La Motte said: 'Sexism is almost a taboo subject in the polite apolitical world of craft. To remain apolitical on such an important issue as this is to support the status quo, and the status quo is: 1) though female students at art schools number over 50% of the student body, the average female staff in art schools is 10%...female students have no role models.

should change their use of the word 'craftsman', saying if people 'have to consciously think of saying craftsperson (crafter, craft worker, take your pick, designer-maker even) then their consciousness is being changed just as it is when people are persuaded to say black rather than nigger.'[280] Vivienne Binns also argued that 'some of the conditioned attitudes of women towards themselves and their capabilities are reinforced by language...they do not feel/think they are capable of this or that because everything associated with it is masculine.'[281]

Language was not the only issue, but it reinforced the political framework in which people worked. Women, in fact, had figured prominently in leadership positions and as role models in the history of the Australian crafts movement in the postwar period (in contrast to the visual arts). These women saw themselves not as passive supporters, but, like their male colleagues, as people seeking a professional working life and the status it deserved.[282] But it also appears that many women in the crafts movement - and it was largely a women's movement - did not have professional aspirations and were content to maintain traditional terminology and a traditional perception of what the crafts might mean.[283]

Links with design

At the same time as it was seeking identity with art, the crafts movement also maintained an anomalous relationship with interior and industrial design. Most designers did not consider themselves as craftspeople at all, and seemed to succeed, not through art galleries but through design showrooms, and as businesses working in collaboration with architects and interior designers. Textile designers Annan Fabrics and Frances Burke and furniture designer Fred Ward,[284] for example, saw themselves as designers making handmade

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2) Lack of recognition at an educational level of the possibilities of traditional female craft skills in areas like sculpture; mostly staffed by males, therefore male techniques. 3) sex-typing in occupations. 4) because of the above, women are less successful in [gaining] Crafts Board grants, where successful individual applications total 30.5 per cent.' Summarised from Pru La Motte *Craft Australia* 1979/1 50

[280]Pru La Motte ibid (1979)

[281]Vivienne Binns, cited in La Motte, ibid (1979)

[282]Although at the end of the 3rd Potters Conference in 1983, June Lord pointed out that she still had to remind people that: the 3 opening speakers were all men; evening lectures were given by 5 men and 1 woman; the panellists were 29 men to 9 women; the demonstrations were given by 47 men and 13 women. The conference working committee, however, was made up of 9 women and 5 men, and the participants in the conference were 375 women and 102 men. June Lord, *Report of 3rd Potters Conference*, Potters Society of Australia (1983)

[283]Interview with Margaret Ainscow 1986. Ainscow was one who noted this attitude amongst her mature-age textile students.

[284]Annan Fabrics was established by Anne Outlaw and Alexandra (Nance) Mackenzie in 1941; Frances Burke Fabrics established 1937, Fred Ward active from the 1930s. See Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) 55, 176-177, 190

production items. They found work in providing items that complemented and 'warmed' the starkness of the new architecture. While some craftspeople did seek a place within the development of modernist architecture and design, the primary response was still to provide an alternative to its perceived inhumanity.[285]

On the one hand the crafts movement tended to reject anything that was linked too closely with industry and production, which included the metal, plastic and plywood furniture of contemporary Australian furniture designers like Grant and Mary Featherston *(see Plate 11: following page)* and Clement Meadmore, and the semi-industrial production wares of the Martin Boyd Pottery. But on the other hand, it is significant that there were architects and designers on the committees of almost all the Craft Associations when they were formed later in the 1960s, and that the 'humanising' crafts and design objectives coincided in a number of ways with their architectural practice.[286]

Those in the crafts movement were consistent in wanting to use the skills of designers in presenting exhibitions, and in providing a professionally organised environment where crafts could be considered. Despite the rejection of industrial processes and products, many craftspeople knew that interest, enthusiasm, skill, the enjoyment of materials and the importance of personal expression were not enough. As Heather Dorrough remembered: 'Design was a magic word; people thought if you had it you'd be OK. It was the magic key, but you couldn't tell anyone how to do it'.[287]

Into the 1970s, in each media, while there remained a core of practitioners interested in working in a 'traditional' way, the effects of new influences in art and design could be clearly noticed. In particular, art ideals were to have an identifiable attraction and effect.

The crafts in Australia: towards art ideals

Ceramics

In ceramics, throughout the 1960s, while the Anglo-Oriental aesthetic

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[285]For many people, the new functionalist International architecture, with its use of concrete surfaces, curtain walls and 'glass box' buildings, was eventually to lose favour because of its inhuman scale and appearance. Many craft trade skills were lost as the architects of these buildings abandoned 'decoration'.

[286]Potter Harold Hughan was an engineer; machine-embroiderer Heather Dorrough had trained as an interior designer in London. Many on the early committees of the Crafts Associations were architects; in galleries, Betty Beaver in Canberra and David Foulkes-Taylor in Perth had trained in interior design and potter Ian Sprague, who set up the Crafts Centre in Melbourne in 1964, was an architect. Mary White was a founding member of the Craft Association of Australia (NSW) and also president of the Society of Interior Designers in the 1960s; Frances Burke, who established the first registered screenprintery in Australia, was president of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria for many years, and a founder member of the Society of Industrial Designers in 1947.

[287]Interview with Heather Dorrough (1986)

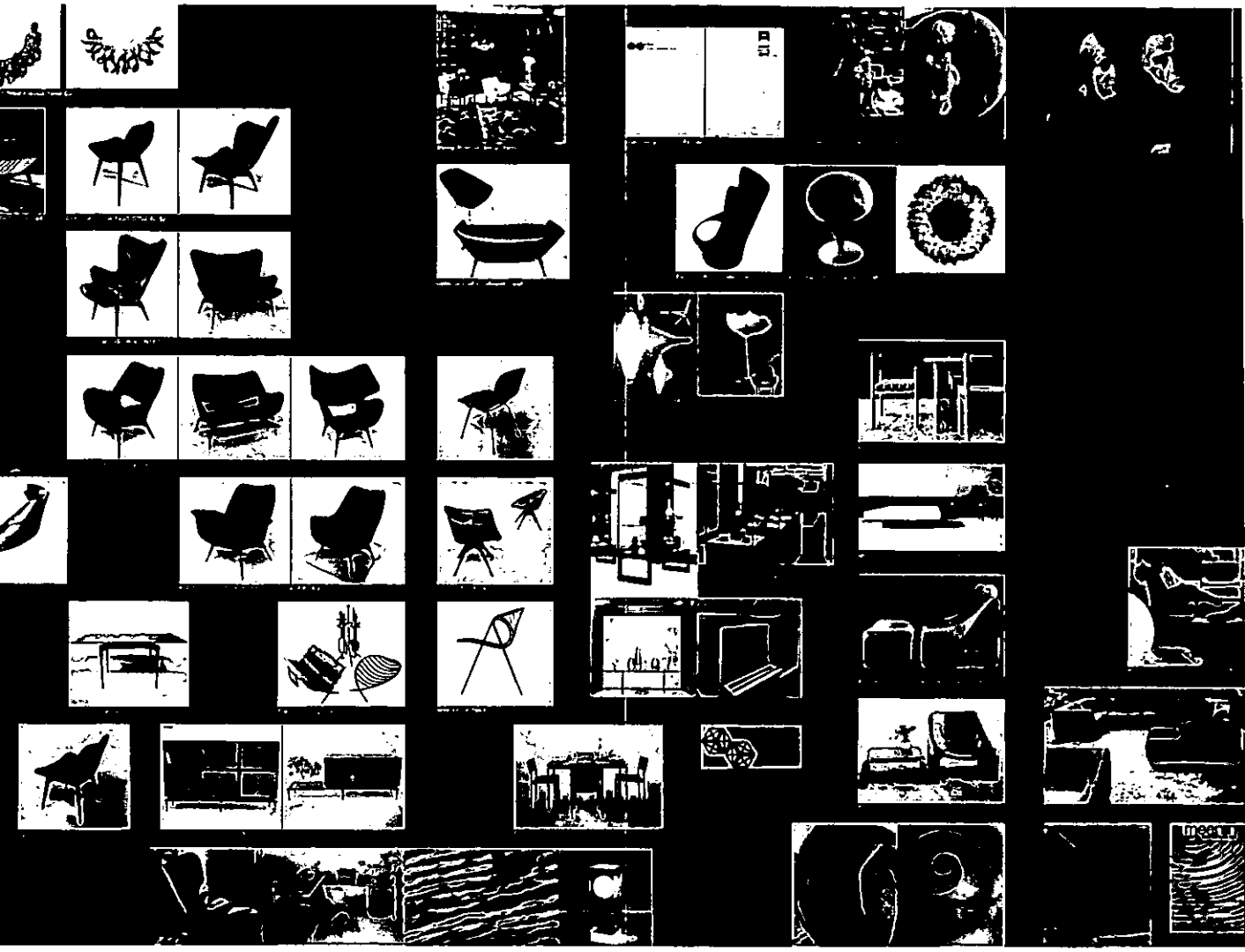

Plate 11: Grant and Mary Featherston
(see page 98) Catalogue, *Grant and Mary Featherston* Furniture City 11-23 August 1975.

Grant Featherston (1922-1995), in partnership with Mary Featherston (b.1943) from 1961, was one of the first post-war designers to embrace new materials and technologies (like moulded plastics and plywood, later fibreglass and polyurethane foam) in the production of furniture. Their furniture was designed with the user in mind, especially chairs 'where the forms may be read as the "negatives" of the human body...It is certain', they said in this catalogue in 1975, 'that our designs are evocative of the biological. We constantly collect and photograph animal and plant life forms. In these we find a profound order surpassing the designs of man.'

However, Grant Featherston had started in the 1940s as a hand-craft manufacturer before developing template manufacturing processes, and, like craftspeople at the time, felt strongly about materials and the social purpose of a designer. 'Looking back, the spirit and enterprise of the 1940s and 1950s were extraordinary. Architects, designers (and others) kicked off the traces of pre-war lethargy, confident of making a new society - a new society with its own interpretation and expression in the arts.'
Grant Featherston in Terence Lane, *Featherston Chairs* (1987)

remained strong in Australia, supported by all the ceramics courses, potters' societies and literature,[288] the pursuit of an art ideal either in form or in its reception, became prevalent. Wanda Garnsey and Ken Hood had written of the former direction in 1972:

> In recent years the upsurge in the number of people who want to know more about pottery has been overwhelming. Though it is the most disciplinary of all the crafts, it has been the most sought after, either as a form of pure creative expression or as an outlet from the pressures of daily life. The urge to create something personal and expressive from the elements of the environment is still an aesthetic and psychological need for man everywhere...If the machinery of our atomic age has left its trail of bewilderment and confusion it has also called upon the resilient nature of mankind to find a way to that renewal of spirit from which will evolve the adaptation and fundamental reconstruction necessary to survival.[289]

However, with the increasing contact through overseas networks, the influences of other practices were noticed, such as the modernist ceramics of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper in the United Kingdom, the expressionist work of Peter Voulkos in the United States and Funk ceramics from Robert Arneson and others in California. The sculptural ceramic forms of Bill Gregory, Bert Flugelman and Alex Leckie, for example, sometimes in organic shapes and sometimes figurative and often painted with bright colours, provided a new direction in Adelaide in the 1960s.

What was later dubbed 'Skangaroovian Funk' by Daniel Thomas,[290] developed around ceramic artists who followed them in Adelaide, including Margaret Dodd, who had worked with Arneson in California in the late 1960s, and developed her series of ceramic Holden cars based on gender relations that exist in the surf/car sub-culture. During the 1970s more ceramic artists, like Mark Thompson *(see Plate 9: before page 76)*, Sandra Taylor, Lorraine Jenyns, Joan Grounds and Bernard Sahm, were to move away from the predominant functional aesthetic and experimented with satirical forms, sometimes drawing on earlier ceramic traditions like painted porcelain figures.

Similarly encouraging was the 1971 visit of expressionist ceramic artist Paul Soldner, who, in his raku workshops, is remembered for his showmanship, enthusiasm, and irreverence for something most people were taking very seriously.[291] His example of punching and tearing clay to make expressive

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[288]Australians started to make their own direct links with Japan, where the revived folk craft philosophy held great appeal, and Japanese potters like Takeichi Kawai and Shoji Hamada were invited to Australia and New Zealand to lecture, give workshops and exhibit. Other Japanese potters, like Hiroe Swen (formerly Takebe) and Shigeo Shiga came to Australia to live. English visitors like Michael Cardew, also part of the crafts revival, were also to have long-term influences.

[289]Kenneth Hood and Wanda Garnsey *Australian Pottery* (1972) 7

[290]Daniel Thomas in Judith Thompson *Skangaroovian Funk* catalogue (1986)

[291]Interview with Janet Kovesi (1986). Soldner's visit was initiated by Joan Campbell, who had visited him in America, and he was brought out by the Potters Society of Australia.

forms was followed enthusiastically in Australia. Potters also became involved in other art-like activity: 'performances' and 'happenings', involving rolling in wet clay and creating installations not intended to be fired, also became part of ceramic practice.

Textiles and fashion

For Australian weavers, travel, combined with illustrations and explanations of work seen in magazines, brought some into contact not only with the best exponents overseas of conventional rug and fabric weaving, but also with the new tapestry and large sculptural wall hangings that were being made. Added to those working in the guilds, and those highly trained weavers who had migrated to Australia, were a growing number like Mona Hessing (who spent some time studying weaving techniques in India), Pru Medlin (later La Motte) and Fay Bottrell, who had trained in design or art and who were interested in weaving as an expressive form. Jutta Feddersen shifted from her disciplined German 'master-weaver' background to make large free-hanging works. Towards the end of the sixties and in the early seventies, artists such as Eva Pachucka from Poland and Rinske Driesens from Holland, trained overseas and also making large textiles in this way, also came to live in Australia.

Within the embroiderers guilds, which maintained traditional practices and oriented themselves towards London qualifications and standards, small groups appeared such as the Creative Embroidery Group, established in 1974, following the 'art' directions of the time and aiming to encourage expressive and innovative work. The '62 Group' in London had set up in association with the guild there in order to work more professionally in embroidery. The Australian creative embroiderers modelled themselves on this group and were similarly motivated by their interest in also being involved in 'art'.[292]

Fashion was also influenced by contemporary art, and contributed, in Australia, to the development of 'art clothing'. Australians entered the fashion world led by London and Paris, with Pru Acton and Carla Zampatti, for example, starting to design for young markets in Australia from the early 1960s. Imported textiles such as Marimekko prints and Indian silks began to appear in all states, and by the early 1970s the making of batiked and tie-dyed fabrics became popular, influenced by 'ethnic' and 'primitive' art, and associated with ideals of both alternative life-styles and modern design.[293]

At the same time, the 1970s saw a proliferation of handwoven, crocheted and knitted shawls and clothing lengths, usually in natural, hand-dyed colours. Designers like Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson, working out of their Flamingo Park outlet in Sydney from the early 70s, drew on many of these sources and

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[292]Interviews with Heather Dorrough and Meg Douglas (1986)

[293]The Batik Association of Australia and the Australian Lace Guild were also formed in the 1970s and numerous quiltmakers groups followed the revival of interest following the American bicentennial celebrations in the late 1970s.

provided a lead in colourful, exotic clothing with motifs of Australiana. They pioneered the idea of 'art-clothes': clothes made not only to be worn, but also as expressive art statements, shown in galleries in the 1980s in exhibitions like *Art Knits* and *Art Clothes*.

There was a remarkable burst of activity in Adelaide in the 1970s, centred on both exotic clothing and fibre sculpture events like performances, each of which saw the establishment of groups to further these ends.[294] In 1979 both the Designers Collective and the South Australian Fibreworks Collective emerged to discuss ways of extending people's perceptions about working in fibre, and to organise a project for the 1980 Adelaide Festival. Some of the events in the festival included Tineke Adolphus's *Laundry Line*, of giant clothes strung across the Festival Centre plaza; Pat Grummet and Richard Brecknock's *Monday Blues*, a daily performance of 'twenty years of family sagas' where indigo-dyed items of family clothing were hung out in a public space near different sized tents representing changing family structures; and Pru La Motte's performance *The Weaver as Unraveller*, where she shut herself in a cage in the Mall for three days and wove and unravelled according to the legend of Penelope. Members of these collectives carried out a number of innovative events and works over the next few years.[295]

In all textile fields, the influence of art was extraordinarily challenging to what had been a conservative field that had been obsessed with technical perfection. The new textile works were regarded warmly by their audiences: people quickly adopted embroidered, crocheted, handspun and dyed clothing. Architects commissioned huge textile works for new public buildings that could be at once, a sculptural form, an 'environment' and sometimes a 'happening'. From the more sceptical design-orientation of the eighties and beyond, this decade is remembered familiarly as the time of the 'hairy wall-hanging'.

Jewellery and metalwork

In jewellery and metalwork, changes influenced by both art and design overseas were brought to Australia through magazines and travel, and the first hand experience of apprentice-trained migrant jewellers and silversmiths from Europe and Scandinavia. For migrants like Helge Larsen, who were used to the possibility of designing for commissions or for trade, it was disconcerting to find in the sixties that art galleries and exhibitions were the main

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[294] In 1978 professional textile designers in Adelaide met to discuss a proposal for a union, and, after a few months as the Cloth and Clothing Union, they formed as the Fashion and Textile Designers Guild, and planned a sequence of performance events to promote a collective range of clothing. Two separate groups grew out of this guild in 1979: the Designers Collective, and the South Australian Fibreworks Collective.

[295] See Grace Cochrane (1992) 362-3 for further examples of these events.

marketplace for their work.[296] Alongside trade jewellers, and the few small studio jewellery workshops like Rhoda and Dorothy Wager and Niina Ots in Sydney and the Lintons in Perth, some sculptors in Australia, such as Emanuel Raft and Inge King, had also been exhibiting and creating a market for jewellery in the 1960s.

Through the challenges posed from the early seventies by jewellers associated with the new galleries like Electrum in London and Gallery Ra in Amsterdam, jewellery increasingly became more an artist's statement about what 'wearing' or 'value' might mean, rather than an object for investment and adornment. Jewellery was now discussed as small 'sculpture'.

At the same time, through their aggressive worldwide promotional programs, Scandinavian design industries sent speakers, demonstrators and exhibitions round the world, and a few outlets, like Georg Jensen's, were established in Australia. Norman Creighton remembers a Jensen exhibition in Melbourne in the late 1960s: 'We went as a group, and saw the film of the factory - we were goggle-eyed. It was the first opportunity to pick up a piece of handcrafted silver, a fish-dish 2-3 feet long. That day electrified the next ten to twelve years.'[297]

The main jewellery and metalworking 'schools' emerged, perhaps too easily generalised as German in Melbourne, centred on the established courses offered at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) with Wolf Wennrich (from the early 70s with an abstract graphic aesthetic); and Scandinavian in Sydney (focusing mostly on concept and form), centred on a number of independent migrants like Helge Larsen working there. Ray Stebbins also recalls the influence in the 1960s of the Goldsmiths Hall catalogues from Britain, showing the work of, for example, Gerald Benny and Andrew Grima, British jewellers making 'organic' decorative work, following the lead of the free forms of abstract expressionism in art, in reaction to the more austere Scandinavian aesthetic.[298] Robert Bell observed that the interest in these designs in Western Australia in the late sixties and early seventies coincided with the mining boom there, encouraging the expressive and symbolic use of uncut stones and natural rock forms.[299]

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[296]Interview with Helge Larsen and Darani Lewers (1986). Larsen trained in an apprenticeship system in Denmark and came to Australia in 1961.

[297]Interview with Norman Creighton (1986)

[298]Dorothy Erickson (interview, 1986) adds that the popularity of their style also spread though being illustrated in the *Australian Women's Weekly*.

[299]Interviews with Ray Stebbins, Dorothy Erickson, Robert Bell (1986). As well as Rod Edwards, who had moved to England earlier, Stuart Devlin also established himself in Britain in the 1960s. Some Australians like Larsen & Lewers were invited to exhibit overseas from the early sixties, and some were commissioned to make work for Expo '67 in Montreal.

With few formal training courses in jewellery and metalwork elsewhere in Australia, a strong demand grew for informal teaching workshops.[300]As the crafts council network developed, jewellers met overseas were invited to Australia. Arline Fisch, an American jeweller, was a key member of the World Crafts Council and came to Australia first in 1972, giving lectures and workshops round the country. Working with woven wires, body-plates and primitive imagery, she was amongst the first to bring a strong influence towards making theatrical 'art-jewellery' for the body. Following, was the provocative exhibition, On Tour: 10 British Jewellers, brought by Ralph Turner in 1977, where the jewellery was made primarily as a statement of the maker, which might find a similar response from a potential wearer.

Some of the ideals of art were clearly of importance to craftspeople and contributed to important changes in attitude. In 1980, for example, speaking to jewellers at their first national conference, Tom Arthur considered the change that took place in the relationship between Minimal artists and their audiences in the 1960s: a change that questioned the values people had placed on art. That was, he said:

> ...the minimalist's decisive rejection of the self-sufficiency of the object, in favour of the context it was placed in...It was a radical shift from the object as being all-important, to what the observer perceives and experiences as being all-important, and in that sense was aesthetically what was being marketed.

He suggested that even though jewellery had the advantage of an involvement with the audience through being work on the body, it still subscribed to a one-way relationship. 'I think that much of the work that we see is work that seeks to explain to other people in a really dogmatic fashion that this is the way the maker sees it. What is needed is work that lets other people have a part in what it is...'[301]

By 1984, in the exhibition Cross Currents, showing work from Australia, Germany, Holland and Britain, curator Helge Larsen confirmed the changes that had taken place during the 1970s:

> Jewellers seem interested in reaching a wider public than the traditional small circle of wealthy patrons. By exploring new production methods and a variety of non-precious materials they are seeking to establish a more direct contact with the public.

He pointed out that the exhibition included some of the radical influences from Europe alongside the work of a new generation, showing that jewellers

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[300]The Queensland Jewellery Workshop Group, the first self-help jewellers group, started in 1971; the Tasmanian Metalcraft Group was set up as part of the Craft Association of Tasmania in 1974. Associated with their first national conference in 1978, in Melbourne, the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Australia (JMGA) was formed as a national organisation.

[301]Tom Arthur 'Directions - Design' *National Jewellery Conference Report* Craft Australia 1980 30-36

were addressing issues of the environment, alongside and interest in technological and economic changes. Moreover, 'The contemporary interest in the human body and the choice of clothes as a medium for self-expression has resulted in work of a new dimension.'[302]

Glass

Following the art direction being pursued in other areas, studio 'art-glass' also made an appearance in Australia from the early 1970s.

During the 1960s most of the glass companies working in either hot-glass production or making windows, had declined in size and scope.[303] Some major sculptural glass commissions were carried out by designer Douglas Annand, and windows by artist Leonard French, but the absence of sufficient major architectural commissions, combined with the development of a gallery system in the sixties that encouraged the production of craftworks as art objects, led stained-glass artists from the early seventies to make 'autonomous panels', or small panels to be considered as art objects. Some no doubt considered that these would advertise possibilities for larger work to architects, although others, such as Bill Gleeson with a background as a painter, and Klaus Zimmer as a printmaker, saw their glass panels as extensions of those practices.

Meanwhile commercially produced functional, simple hot glass pieces designed by craftspeople for industry, had appeared in Italy, Sweden, Finland and Czechoslovakia. This work was illustrated in *Studio International*, and was brought to Australia largely through the promotional tours of firms like Kosta Boda. When the Crown Crystal Glass Company transferred its hand-blowing operations from Australia to New Zealand in the iate 1960s, the Leonora Glass Works near Newcastle, with its skilled glass-blowers, was the only remaining firm making hand-blown glass until it too, closed in the late 1970s.

Hot glass-blowing as a studio art-practice was not seen in Australia until Stephen Skillitzi and a few others started blowing glass, following the American expressionist lead, in 1972-1973. This small area was encouraged during the 1970s by direct intervention from the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, who brought out Americans Richard Marquis and Bill Boysen in

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[302]Helge Larsen *'Cross Currents: Jewellery from Australia, Britain, Germany, Holland'* Powerhouse Museum, Sydney 1984 8

[303]Interview with Bill Gleeson (1986). Gleeson, who had worked with the Melbourne firm of Brooks Robinson and Co., believes that after the proliferation of restoration, memorial and centenary windows following the war, the big companies were too slow to offer modern designs, and architects could not commission their work for new buildings. Hot glass industries, like Crown Corning, Phillips and other, declined in the sixties and by the late 70s all blowing facilities were closed.

1974, to give a series of workshops and residencies designed to establish glass studios in art schools and train local glassblowers.[304]

They, along with American Sam Herman, who came from Britain to set up the glass workshop at the Jam Factory Craft Workshops in Adelaide, also in 1974, had gained their experience in the university glass studios in the United States. They espoused a free-form aesthetic that (apart from reflecting the limited control they had over their materials and equipment) also celebrated the expressive autonomy of the individual.

Furniture and woodwork

The predominant interest in the 1960s in this area had been for mass-produced or small-production furniture made in new materials and modern designs by people like Grant and Mary Featherstone and Clement Meadmore, following the lead from overseas designers.

There were few fine furniture designers and makers using wood from the 1940s to the 1960s to follow the example of Fred Ward and Schulim Krimper in Melbourne. When the woodcrafts revival did begin in the mid-1970s, it was to be in the context of an expressive personal alternative to industry, under the umbrella of the crafts movement.[305] Woodturner Stephen Hogbin and furniture designer Donald Lloyd McKinley were brought from Canada in the 1970s,[306] drawing attention to the work of Americans like Wharton Esherick, Wendell Castle and James Krenov, who had been key figures in the development of 'art-craft' timber furniture. While their work paid attention to fine construction, it was also often eccentricly abstract and 'organic' in its form.

From this time, through the development of woodworking organisations around the country, works following a similar aesthetic provided an opportunity for expressive virtuosity in both furniture and sculptural forms. Tasmanian maker, Kevin Perkins, for example, made furniture that combined exceptional construction with timbers that retained elements of their natural form and texture, and carved elements that provided personal narratives of family and place. By contrast, the English designer-maker, John Makepeace, who also visited Australia in the 1970s, set up a woodworking school at Parnham House in England that focused on finely-finished formal designs. Australians travelled to continue contact with this diverse range of people or to enrol in their courses, and their influence returned, with them, to Australia.

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[304]Following the first Glass Conference in 1978, a national organisation, eventually called Ausglass, was formed.

[305]The Tasmanian Woodcraftsmen's Association was set up in 1976; the Woodworkers Group of New South Wales in late 1977, and other groups or guilds in other states. Some, such as the Victorian Woodworkers Association, formed after the first National Wood Conference in Melbourne in 1979.

[306]Hogbin was originally from England; McKinley from the United States.

As the revival of crafts wood-working progressed, for many the interest in materials, techniques and fine finishes was matched with a desire to include sculptural features on furniture, or to make sculpture that was often suggested by the natural form of the timber. While some woodworkers had had (often very basic) design training, very few indeed had any experience of the changing issues of contemporary sculpture. This group was still strongly influenced by an 'object' aesthetic, although there were also a number of forays into chainsaw-made furniture and sculpture, as part of the art aesthetic that denied the value of materials and skills.

Conclusion

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, there remained continuing philosophical connections and contradictions between the foundation of a crafts-based aesthetic and practice and the ideals of designing products for a marketplace.

But postwar educational philosophies and international responses to Modernism in art and design included an emphasis on the personal expression and development of the individual.

Increasingly, for many craftspeople, the values of the fine arts that favoured the ideal of the independent, expressive individual and of making 'sculptural', 'non-functional' or later 'conceptual' craft objects, became more appealing than ideal of making functional crafts for a domestic marketplace.

At its extreme, this ideal included a denial of the values associated with a concern for materials, skills and processes, and a rejection of ornament, decoration and function. Australian craftspeople developed a strong organisational infrastructure to better give them a status equal to visual artists and this put them in direct contact with their international counterparts who were making close connections with art ideals.

But the dominant influence of centres like the New York art world not only created a 'provincialism' in relation to the rest of the Western art world, which deferred to its identity as a centre, but also caused some in other practices, like the crafts, to begin to deny their own histories, processes and purposes, in favour of similar dominant art ideals.

While some craftspeople successfully met the challenges of pursuing art ideals, many others did not: they were either working with ideas the art world had discarded; were too far detached from the initial source of current radical challenges to be able to successfully respond to them; or were unable to draw contemporary art meanings from within the traditions of their own practice.

Within such significant contradictions, crafts practitioners were maturing in all their experiences and attitudes, and during the 1970s their support structure of education and funding institutions and the marketplace strengthened.

The next chapter will explore the contributions of this infrastructure towards changing ideals, and more significantly, the art world's response to its efforts.

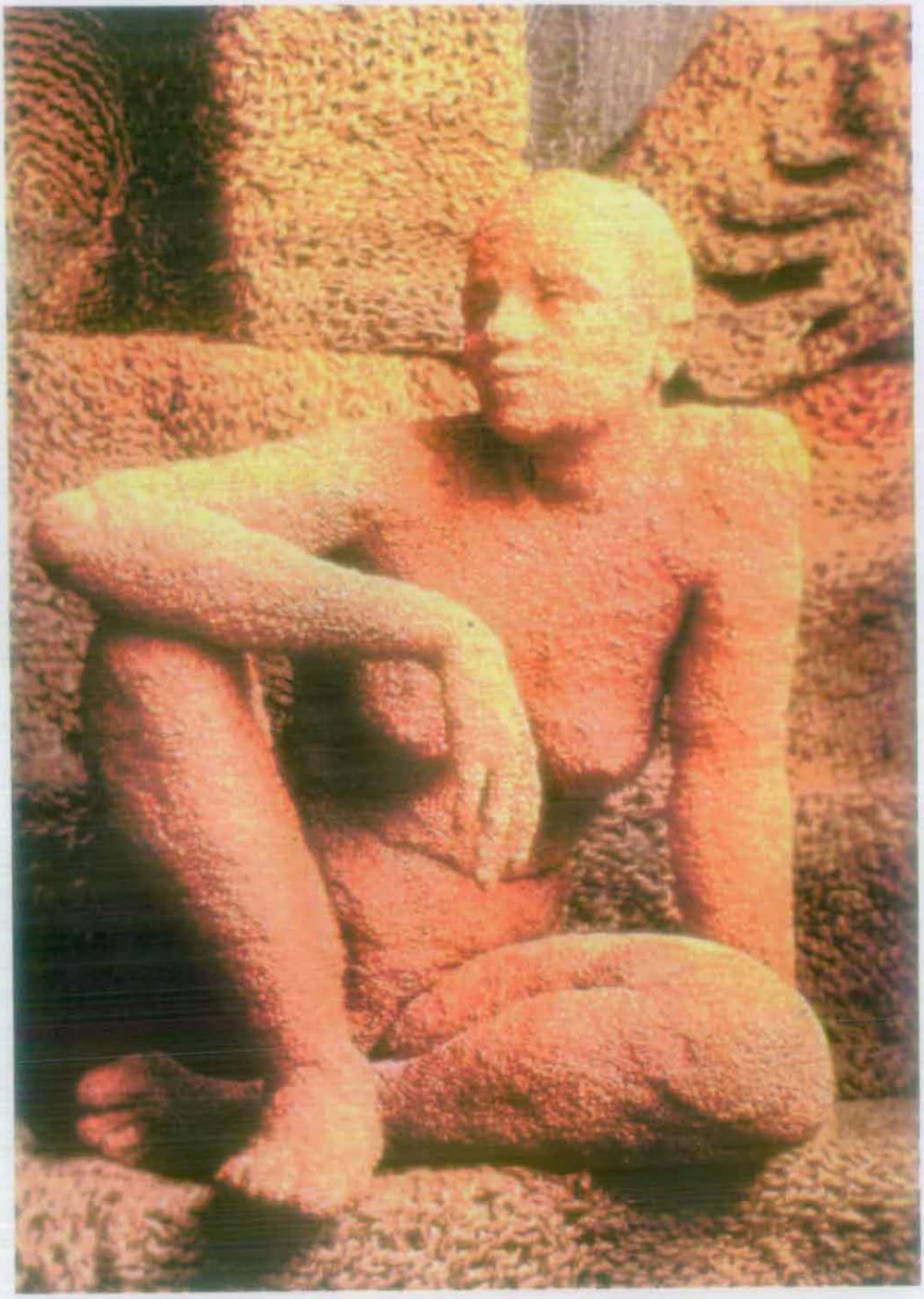

Plate 12: Ewa Pachucka
(see page 134) Detail of installation *Arcadia: Landscape and bodies*, crocheted figure in polypropylene and hemp over polyester foam padding, made in Hobart in 1975-77. (total installation size 244 x 396cm).

Ewa Pachucka (b.1936) came from Poland to Australia in 1971 from a background of graphics and expressionist sculpture, alongside a revival of folk textiles. One of a number of influential Eastern Europeans working in monumental forms in fibre, she had already exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where the 'art textile' or 'art fabric' was part of the idology of the American crafts movement. Her professional example as a 'textile artist' was a profound influence in Australia.

Chapter 4:
Finding a place: education, money and the marketplace, the 1970s

This chapter will survey the responses of educational institutions, funding bodies and the marketplace to the wide range of the crafts movement's ideals and activities in the 1970s, and to the wide public support it enjoyed. It will show that the crafts were supported as a separate valid force, but that this support nonetheless occurred within the expectations and constraints of the art and design worlds of which the crafts movement sought to be part. The crafts movement's particular pursuit of art ideals was acknowledged and even fostered by the infrastructure of the visual arts, but 'art-craft' practice was rarely accepted by the art world.

Introduction

The many crafts organisations that now existed in the 1970s were active in using their efficient network to extend the experiences and involvement of both their members and the general public that supported them.

The policies of the new Labor government in 1973 addressed most of the 'causes' of the 1960s. No-one, dissenters and supporters alike, could believe the scale and scope of the political, legal and institutional changes that were made. They were undoubtedly, for those in the arts, 'heady years'.[307] The new policies included a commitment to help develop a national identity through artistic expression, and to project Australia's image in other countries through the arts. The new nationalism that developed was seen to be plural, tolerant, multicultural, and also closely identified with the arts and cultural achievement.[308]

In the arts, as well as in education, institutional emphasis was placed on two main ideals: excellence in what was provided and attained, and greater access and opportunity for more people to participate in, and experience the arts. The establishment of both the Crafts Councils' organisational and information network and the funding facilities of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council brought increased contact for craftspeople throughout Australia and other parts of the world, and development occurred that before had not been thought possible. Travel, visitors, exhibitions, collections, workshop establishment, new courses, traineeships and publications challenged and extended both craftspeople and institutions.

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[307]Interview with Les Blakebrough (1986)
[308]Richard White *Inventing Australia* (1981) 169

Craftspeople, often through their very existence, reflected much of the spirit of the time, but so also did the various educational and organisational institutions reflect their needs. There were many successful enterprises that supported and reinforced the traditional ideals of the crafts movement, and its relationship to design and industry, as a practice that was social in its purpose and practical in its effect, while still being a way of finding personal and emotional satisfaction.

However, the art world's structure and system of dealer galleries, art museum collections, art journals and art schools remained the most effective model for making, marketing and gaining respect in the wider cultural arena. Inevitably, although this was rarely, if ever, commented on critically at the time, a pattern developed where the works that most closely approximated what was considered 'art', were more aspired to, and acclaimed, than others.[309]

Funding the crafts

Towards the end of the 1960s, the first moves were made to rationalise and co-ordinate the ways in which the federal government funded the arts, a development that was to reach its fullest form in the reshaped Australian Council for the Arts, later the Australia Council.[310] During the 1970s state governments also expanded or established funding agencies for the arts. For the first time the crafts had the same access to state and federal funds as other art forms.[311]

The Australia Council

More than any other single influence, the Australian Council for the Arts, as it was reformed in 1973, gave a focus to the developing sense of cultural identity across all art forms. Incoming Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's election policy speech for the arts in 1972 proposed the formation of a statutory council to administer funds to the arts through boards that would be representative of all art forms, including the crafts, and expressed a commitment to promote Australian cultural activity and identity within Australia and overseas.

'In any civilised community', reflected Whitlam in 1985, 'the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not

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[309]This was clearly not the first time that the art ideal in the crafts or decorative arts was afforded greater value (see Chapter 1, introduction); but the pattern developed again in this particular context.

[310]First established as the Australian Council for the Arts under the Liberal government as a division of the prime minister's department in 1968, to co-ordinate funding for the performing arts and consider other art needs. An advisory role to the minister, and did not include visual arts and crafts funding. In 1973 the Council gathered in all the *ad hoc* committees, trusts and funds into a statutory authority, becoming the Australia Council in March 1975. See Tim Rowse *Arguing the Arts* (1985), and *Artforce* 19 3

[311]For a full summary of state and federal funding for the crafts, see Grace Cochrane *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History* (1992) Chapter 7

be seen as something remote from everyday life...I would argue that all the other objectives of a Labor Government - social reform, justice and equity in the provision of welfare services and educational opportunities - have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts and the appreciation of spiritual and intellectual values can flourish...even with the most generous and imaginative schemes the arts could not be grafted onto a society that was barren and hostile to them.'[312]

Proposals for a revised council were largely the work of the previous chairperson, Dr H. C. Coombs, and executive officer Dr Jean Battersby. They decided to formulate a single statutory council with art-form boards - including one for the crafts - following the models of Canada and Great Britain.[313] Some of the boards at least had some notion of where to start funding because theatre, music and literature, and to a certain extent the visual arts, had existing funding structures. The Crafts Board also had an advantage because of the ten years of planning that had gone into the development of the Craft Association network since 1964, as well as the benefits that would come of the Crafts Enquiry, set up in March 1972.

A preoccupation of the council was to fund excellence, but this goal became increasingly contentious, as the council was set up during a time when the notion of what excellence was, and who decided it, was being questioned. During the following years, provision for access to, and participation in the arts by the wider community also became an important consideration, and the Community Arts Committee became a board in 1977. This decision occurred at the same time that small and experimental organisations working in other art forms began to demand a fair share of funding through the reduction of support to, for example, the capital-city-based, traditional 'flagship' performing arts companies, and 'blockbuster' exhibitions.

As well as responding to grant applications and determining policies for national initiatives through the work of the boards, (through peer-group assessment and the 'arms-length principle'), the council also encouraged state and local government participation in funding, as well as contributions from other non-arts agencies, such as the trade union movement and education authorities, and the development of cultural links overseas. During the 1980s the council initiated a number of major inquiries that dealt with issues affecting the practice of the arts, the arts industry and the status of the individual artist.[314]

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[312]Gough Whitlam *The Whitlam Government* (1985) 553

[313]The council established advisory committees in various specialist fields and, started to fund music, the crafts and Aboriginal arts; a 1969 report led to the establishment of the National Film and Television school, the Film Development Corporation and an experimental film fund.

[314]Their reports provided analyses and statistical data on the individual artist in Australia, education, moral rights, private sector funding, employment, multicultural arts, affirmative action, tourism, measuring community benefits from the arts, occupational health and

Other government funding

In the economic affluence of the late sixties and early seventies, and under the influence of the climate of the time which made Australian cultural development popular, state governments also started to establish arts funding agencies. Their objectives were very similar to those of the Australia Council, and as the 1970s progressed, they funded a number of joint projects with it. Some states funded programs for individuals; some developed public art programs; some were given responsibility for existing galleries, museums and performing arts companies; and a number of craft centres like the Meat Market Craft Centre and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Victoria, and the Jam Factory Workshops in South Australia, were established for both cultural and economic reasons.

As well as money specifically allocated for the arts, other government funds were used to contribute to arts development, as they also served to meet the needs of those departments. These included instant lottery money, casino income, employment of artists for community and public art through Commonwealth employment schemes and links with industrial development, and income through tourism. Many local governments also became involved, particularly with community arts projects.

Funding for specific projects, such as visitors and exhibitions, was also shared with agencies like the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the Australia-Japan Foundation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, while travelling scholarships were available from the Harkness and Churchill fellowship schemes. These were seen to advance cultural exchange. In the 1980s, the federal agency Austrade, set up to encourage trade and export overseas, included visual arts and crafts 'products' as part of its concerns.[315]

The general climate of the early 1970s at least, was of a co-operative working towards the same goals. In relation to the crafts, some important initiatives were only realised because of the collaboration between these bodies.

The Crafts Board

The inclusion of a Crafts Board, as well as a Visual Arts Board, in the Australia Council was a major factor in the identification of the crafts as a separate force within the broad spectrum of the arts. It was largely the result of a strong lobby from the Crafts Council of Australia, which by 1973 had been operating as a national office for eighteen months, with ten years of state involvement behind it, combined with the personal interest of Coombs and

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safety, technology, art and working life, and changing work and leisure patterns. At the same time, the council made submissions to major government inquiries, such as for tourism, broadcasting, taxation, copyright and moral rights.

[315]Organisations like the Visual Arts/Craft Board, the Crafts Council of Australia and the National Association of Visual Arts worked to use Austrade's programs to advantage.

Battersby in the Australian Council for the Arts. Until the gradual development of state funding bodies and the increasing investment in the area by art schools and galleries, in most cases the Crafts Board was the sole funding support for activities ranging from professional to community development, for individuals and organisations. Like the Crafts Council of Australia (which the board funded), the board was interventionist and entrepreneurial where it saw fit, and played a role in negotiating politically and culturally at national and international level.

The first board reflected most of the professional skills and needs of the craft world. It set up a program for allocation of grants for individual and workshop development, and for the support of the developing infrastructure of the Craft Associations and other groups. Importance was placed on bringing exhibitions into Australia and international visitors to lecture and work through residencies. The traineeship program, which subsidised the placement of trainees in the workshops and businesses of master-craftspeople, was an early and continuing successful scheme. A network had already been established through involvement with the World Crafts Council, and for some years many visitors to Australia appeared to come straight out of the pages of the American journal *Craft Horizons*. At the same time, residencies and workshops were encouraged within Australia; national exhibitions were commissioned and toured; and lobbies were mounted to encourage crafts development in art schools and galleries. These were combined with other programs, through film-making for example, to promote public perception of the crafts as a professional practice. Les Blakebrough recalls: 'Can you imagine what it was like, coming from Sturt where I'd started with £1 a week and my keep, having spent all those years driving up and down to meetings, to be sitting round that table on the first board with nearly a million dollars to spend? We wanted to do everything at once.'[316]

The Crafts Enquiry (1972-1975) was possibly the first of many subsequent Australia Council surveys of professional arts employment. Its report was published as *The Crafts in Australia: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Crafts* in 1975, and both the Crafts Board and the Crafts Councils used the information and recommendations as the basis for the directions of their policies and programs.[317] Its terms of reference were: to inquire into the general state of the crafts in Australia as a professional activity, relating them to industry and industrial design, and to the whole spread of experience in the creative processes; to report on organisation, distribution and development of the crafts in Australia, including financial and social aspects; and to report and

[316]Interview with Les Blakebrough (1986)

[317]The Committee of Enquiry into the Crafts (the Crafts Enquiry) was set up in March 1972, with chairperson Kym Bonython, by the McMahon Liberal government, at the instigation of the Crafts Council of Australia. The new Labor government brought the inquiry into the Australia Council in 1973, and appointed three craftspeople to the committee. Felicity Abraham was appointed director in June 1973.

make recommendations to the minister responsible for the arts as to how the crafts might be assisted to achieve all these objectives.

A 70 per cent response to a questionnaire found that crafts practitioners, like the rest of the population, lived in cities or suburbs of cities. The 'typical' craftsperson proved to be a middle-aged woman, a craftsperson for less than ten years, most likely a potter, born in Australia, living in a city, educated to tertiary level, and rating above average socio-economically. Balancing this was the interest being shown in 'alternative life-styles'.[318]

The main perceived 'problem' was the lack of a philosophical attitude of the Australian public towards the crafts, and the lack of recognition of craftspeople as serious professionals. Respondents wanted to see full-time courses for professional education and training, recognised standards, more publicity, more crafts training of primary and secondary teachers, more finance for crafts organisations, and a permanent exhibition of Australian craftwork. These issues rated ahead of requests for the need for information, the review of sales tax on both supplies and sales of work, and help with marketing.

Despite the historical associations of the crafts to industry and the domestic marketplace, a relationship to industry was not seen to be a rewarding area: the committee was aware that the industrial prestige and exporting success of countries such as Finland, Denmark, Germany and Italy, were all founded on the crafts, but found that interest among Australian industries was negligible: many of the ceramic, textile, glass industries had been closing since the 1960s following competition from abroad after the lifting of import restrictions. This circumstance served to further drive the crafts towards an 'art model' for validation.

Apart from responding to grant applications, a number of interventionist exhibition and education programs were developed during the 1970s to meet particular needs.[319] The Crafts Board within the Australia Council was also a

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[318] Of the 1205 practitioners who responded to the Craft Enquiry, 34 per cent worked full-time at their craft, 40 per cent part-time, and the rest were studying or engaged as a leisure activity. Most were middle-aged, and only 17 per cent were under 30. Only 5 per cent earned more than $5,000 a year; (by comparison in 1975, a first-year graduate schoolteacher earned $8,057 a year.) Training for craftspeople was shown to be inadequate: there was a marked difference between the training in Australia, and that in other parts of the Western world. A study of migrant craftspeople revealed a likelihood of loss of skills, as migrants were eager to leave behind old customs and traditions. It was noted that tribal Aboriginal societies recognised no distinction between arts and crafts, and as among other groups, there was a perceived lack of income, information and marketing outlets, and a danger of skills dying out.

[319] One of these efforts was the concerted and co-ordinated effort to introduce glass practice as a studio production activity. Major exhibitions were mounted and toured throughout Australia in the 1970s and into the eighties, and some crafts exhibitions were sent overseas. Exhibitions were also brought from overseas and toured within Australia, often by the Crafts Council of Australia. Smaller exhibitions were also mounted which were directed

precursor and innovator in both community art and art-in-working-life activities and programs, and in offering residencies and traineeships that provided a radical model for other boards in the early 1980s.

A 1979 policy review, based on David Williams's report, *Craft Education and Training*, was possibly the first produced by a board of the Australia Council. It attempted to provide a philosophical basis for funding, and document the shifts and changes achieved since the beginning of the Crafts Board.[320] As a result of its deliberations, the board decided to shift its emphasis towards the development of a professional base through the individual practitioner, on which it believed all other strands of the crafts movement were seen to rest.[321]

Thus, the Crafts Board, from 1973 until 1986, clearly recognised and supported individuals and organisations in the support and promotion of a broad range of practices, valuing and encouraging traditionally oriented studio-practices, as well as design for production and art-oriented works. As well as placing an emphasis on the development of its professional core of practitioners, it also saw value in lobbying for equal share of formal educational opportunities, developing alternative infrastructures like crafts centres, and investing in programs that developed public perceptions of the value of the crafts.

The Visual Arts/Craft Board

Following the *McLeay Report* in 1986, a major restructuring of the Australia Council amalgamated the boards into Performing Arts, Literary Arts, Visual Arts and Craft, and Aboriginal Arts.[322] From 1987, the new Visual Arts/Craft Board redefined its programs into five major areas across both constituencies: professional development of artists, support for a national infrastructure, exhibitions, an international program, and arts advocacy.

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towards community and public places such as bank foyers and shopping centres. From 1973 the Crafts Board had purchased works in all crafts media as a record of the time, often as part of exhibition development, a collection later transferred to the Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia) in 1980.

[320] The Williams report looked at developments in the crafts organisational networks and the way it perceived they were meeting changing needs. It considered developments in the establishment of specialist groups, and in education, exhibition and accessibility at all levels in the crafts community in the context of the board's and the Australia Council's objectives. It also took into account the lack of increase in arts support funds after a period of initial expansion and attempted to forecast developments.

[321] When the Australia Council's budget was reduced in the late 1970s, increasing numbers of individual craftspeople were emerging and seeking support, and controversial decisions were made to shift the emphasis of funding from organisations towards individuals, while maintaining a commitment to such networks, and to exhibition and visitor programs of national importance.

[322] A number of other planning units were set up within the council, including a Community Cultural Development Unit.

Reactions to the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards were mixed. For some time both visual artists and craftspeople feared that the other would dominate not only in ideology but also in funding, but at the same time the amalgamation appeared to contribute to providing a framework where a range of practices could be equally valued.

There were some very positive outcomes from the amalgamation of the two boards into the VACB. Many programs developed in one board were now available to the clients of the other. Visual artists and craftspeople had to address each others concerns and interests. Peer group panels found they had to learn new ways of looking at each others work - which was what was beginning to happen in most art schools anyway through the common history and theory programs and integrated assessment procedures. Equal access to joint programs like overseas studios and professional development grants put different practices on equal footing with equal stature.

But, for a range of reasons, the applications from craftspeople dropped away, so that there was a consequent greater number of applications by visual artists. Originally the two boards had had similar funds to allocate, but by 1995, statistics were produced that showed an accumulated difference of 14 million dollars over the period 1987-1995, in the funding of visual artists over craftspeople by the combined board.[323]

There had not been an overt expectation that one had to make craft as art, in order to get grants, but it was clear that many of the very particular programs that were relevant to crafts practice were reduced - such as workshop establishment, traineeships, residencies and different kinds of research and marketing projects. It was also considered that the 'art' point of view on committees tended to hold greater weight than that of crafts members. For a few years the Board mounted strong advocacy programs for the crafts, such as looking quite specifically at marketing and design initiatives, and they established a 50/50 equal money funding policy regardless of the numbers of applications - a policy that was received with criticism from visual artists, and was abandoned in 1996.

In 1995 it was announced that the Australia Council was again undergoing reform. As part of the reform, the Performing Arts Board was to be separated again into three boards of music, theatre and dance. Not surprisingly, there was a very strong, yet unsuccessful, lobby from the crafts field to redress some of the perceived inequities and separate the visual arts and crafts, once more, into two distinct boards.[324]

The Crafts Enquiry of 1975 had identified the main perceived problem at that time as a lack of an inclusive philosophical attitude towards the crafts (although there was a sound marketplace), and the lack of recognition of

[323]Research paper for the Board by Gillian McCracken, 1995

[324]See for example Darani Lewers 'The Crafts in Crisis' *Art Monthly Australia* 47 March 1992 14-16

craftspeople as serious professionals. Twenty years later, the problem seemed the same. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that after the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards, the inequality of funding levels seemed to reflect, amongst other issues, a difference in the attitudes of both groups of practitioners themselves, and their peers on selection committees, about hierarchies in the relative value of their work, and about attitudes to subsidy.

Throughout all funding, education and administrative agencies, issues of where the crafts were placed, which craftspeople were selected for funding and what kind of work was supported, were dependent on the policies of each agency and the people that were appointed at different times to develop their policies. The 'experiment' of combining the crafts with the visual arts in the Australia Council from 1987 showed clearly that many visual artists on the committees did not know how to 'read' or value functional or decorative craftworks, recognise that the process of making contributed to the content of the object (even though it often did that in the visual arts as well), or acknowledge that different training, establishment and marketing strategies were sometimes necessary. At the same time, the 'art-craft' practices of craftspeople had to undergo the scrutiny of artists, and have their work assessed - often for the first time, and often unsuccessfully - in the arena that they had been seeking to join.

The consequence was that fewer craftspeople applied and were granted support, and of those who were successful, the tendency - despite attempts to review the approach to 'reading' craftworks - was to support those whose work mostly resembled 'art' or those people who had achieved a status that could be accepted by art world structures. This occurred despite a clear revision of objectives amongst many practitioners about the direction of their work, its audience or market (for example towards designing and making rather than 'art'); a clear revaluation of the status of artists as part of the workforce (both issues discussed further in Chapter 6); and attempts by many on the funding committees to accommodate different working practices.[325]

Thus, the amalgamation of the Boards was to have both positive and negative effects on the crafts. On the one hand the crafts were considered equally alongside all other visual arts practices (which they had wanted), but on the other hand it appeared that the prevailing hierarchies of the art world worked against them in assessing value and merit.

The values and validation of the infrastructure of the fine arts over the crafts and design alternatives, still prevailed in funding terms, no matter how well established the infrastructure for crafts and design may have been in the wider field.

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[325]Or at least those committees that had been part of the planning effort to redress the funding imbalance. As committees changed, so, often, did their understanding of, and commitment to, previous policy decisions.

Education in the crafts

Demands for crafts education and training from the 1950s into the 1970s, and the formal and informal opportunities that were initiated or provided, reflect not only a need for training in skills and processes, but also a desire for professional experience associated with crafts philosophies. During the seventies, education institutions increased the number of formal crafts courses they offered, picking up on initiatives such as the summer schools and short-term workshops run by crafts guilds, societies and councils.

However, the pursuit of art ideals in crafts education was encouraged by the pursuit within education institutions themselves for greater status for their courses, which caused them to place greater value on the intellectual than the practical. Significant for the crafts at this time was the change in visual arts practice towards the conceptual rather than the physical, which placed little value on materials, skills and processes.

Thus, while crafts education opportunities increased significantly during this time, by the late 1970s education values within these opportunities changed - in line with current values in the visual arts.

Informal education

In the absence of formal education opportunities, people with special interests had sought tuition and examples wherever they could find them. From the 1950s, interest in being associated with the crafts and learning the necessary skills and processes to work in them far exceeded the availability of formal training opportunities. The many efforts towards the provision of informal education during the post-war decades, through summer schools, crafts trains, crafts caravans, weekend workshops, festival events, and adult education classes were increasingly supported by the provision of funds from local, state and federal governments.

One of the phenomena that started in the sixties and lingered into the nineties were residential schools, or summer schools, as many were called.[326] The schools attracted excellent tutors, usually because they also enjoyed the intense activity and noticeable development during such a concentrated period, and also, for some tutors, a much-needed addition to income. Summer schools developed in states where participants either felt isolated, as in Tasmania, where Bass Strait presented a physical and psychological barrier to travel, or were in fact extremely isolated, such as those who lived beyond

[326]The Handweavers and Spinners Guild of Australia ran annual Loomcraft Schools from 1959. For many years, the Potters Society and East Sydney Technical College ran Ceramic Summer Schools at the College. The Queensland Arts Council vacation school was started in 1961and the Creative Arts Vacation School at Longreach in 1969. Craft Associations ran the Tatachilla Summer School in South Australia from 1971; the the Muresk Residential School in Western Australia from 1974 and the Hobart Summer School in Tasmania from 1979. The Eastern Australia Art School was founded in 1971, becoming the Australian Flying Art School in 1974. See Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) Chapters 4 and 6

Longreach in Queensland, or in distant parts of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia.

Funding bodies in the 1970s responded to pressure from both artists and the community to provide access as well as excellence in the arts. Not only were crafts practitioners enthusiastic about what they were doing; but they were effective in promoting what they believed in - the pleasure of making things by hand, so the crafts had a large following of those who identified with what they represented. Consequently crafts demonstrations and stalls became very much part of large public events like festivals, and the crafts eventually became closely identified with the community arts movement that developed in the 1970s.[327] Craftspeople and their work in the 1970s were symbols of independence and integrity, and few professionals did not involve themselves in these events at some stage or another.

The encouragement of apprenticeship in the crafts, and its association with the development of crafts-based industries in craft centres, also provided an important adjunct to formal education opportunities. This interest was largely because of the absence of formal opportunities at that stage, and also because of the ideological associations apprenticeship had with traditional practice. When the Crafts Board reviewed its traineeship program in 1978, the statistics showed a very high continuation rate for those who were by then working on their own.[328]Australia was soon involved in an international committee on the subject.[329]

Apprenticeship, often identified as traineeships, offered an alternative practical training opportunity in established workshops, a system that had already been operating in places like the Sturt workshops since the 1950s. Trainees also often used the scheme after completing a formal diploma or certificate course, in order to learn about studio management and viable production skills. Apart from the traineeship program funded by the Crafts

[327]See Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) Chapter 7 for more extensive details on community art and festivals.

[328]Two National Gatherings for Young Craftsmen concentrated on needs of courses and transitional experiences from training to making a living. First in Adelaide in 1978, coinciding with the International Society for Education through the Arts (INSEA) congress; second in Melbourne in 1980. In between, a Victorian Gathering of Emerging Craftsmen was held later in 1978. See reports of each conference by Crafts Council of Australia; and *Craft Australia* 1978/4 44; *Crafts Victoria* no 111 Dec 1980.

[329] In 1978 the American Crafts Council held a conference on apprenticeship that discussed the lack of cohesive standards, disparity between academic and apprentice training, and the minimal comprehension of government regulations governing apprenticeship. A National Council for Apprenticeship in Art and Craft was formed, and in 1980 the International Council for Apprenticeship in the Crafts was formed at the World Crafts Council (WCC) conference in Vienna. A key text at this time was Gerry Williams *Apprenticeship in Craft* (1981).

Board, which had operated since 1973, apprentice-training programs were set up in various states at different times.[330]

When the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards amalgamated in 1987, this grant category was subsumed into a general 'projects' grant, where craftspeople did not seem to recognise it, or visual artists value it: traineeships were usually identified with production management skills in a studio that made functional items. The numbers of traineeships declined until a review of programs in about 1994 identified it more clearly as an option.

Art and design schools

From the beginning of the 1960s, Australia's pattern for art, craft and design education was modelled (in theory if not always in practice) not only on the philosophy of developing the whole person through creative activity (a philosophy that had been especially directed towards primary school education), but also on the British example of materials-based design schools.

Britain had been preoccupied after the war with crafts training that placed an emphasis on the development of the individual, but in the mid-fifties, courses at the Royal College of Art in London changed. Courses became more specialised, and six separate materials-based design schools were established, demonstrating the vocationally biased nature of British design education. Ambiguity between vocational training and craft-based design education remained, so that even in 1986 Penny Sparke would observe that 'throughout this century design education has tended to swing between the two poles of utopianism and vocationalism'.[331]

In Australia, attitudes to and relationships between art, craft, design and teacher education changed as institutions were amalgamated and as they tried to adapt to meet new needs and circumstances.[332] Because of Australia's historic links with the British system, crafts courses developed as part of art courses in technical or teachers colleges, somewhere in the middle of the dilemma between utopianism and vocationalism in the making (or designing) of objects for use: between the values associated with the personally expressive aspects of making objects, and a desire to make a worthwhile living as part of a chosen way of life. Ray Stebbins records, for example, that the founders of the art/metalwork certificate course that was established at RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) in 1948, recognised a need for an approach that would meet the vocational needs of relevant industries,

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[330]Apart from Sturt, the most comprehensive were those at the Jam Factory in South Australia from 1974 and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop from 1976, where trainees were required to be art school graduates.

[331]Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the 20th Century* (1986) 72

[332]For a detailed summary of the history of the major schools of art in Australia; course development and key teaching staff in the crafts, see Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) Chapters 4, 7, 8.

yet simultaneously cater for the requirements of individual studio artists. Its course objectives were to promote aesthetic awareness, foster an understanding of design, and develop the use of these skills in the production of innovative works.[333]

The art and design schools or departments within technical colleges in Australia increasingly improved from the late 1950s, and eventually achieved the opportunity to award three-year diplomas for their (few) crafts and design courses. Peter Rushforth recalls of East Sydney Technical College:

> It took the potters 13 years to convince the department that ceramics should be a serious full-time course...right from the beginning there were doubts about the adequacy of college training as opposed to apprentice training. I could see the virtues of both, and tried to steer a combined course that would best benefit the community...Then we were a research unit as well as a teaching unit...During the 1950s and 60s the Technical College was thrown open to summer schools run in conjunction with the Potters Society. Often these were the people who became the first community teachers - long before we had the establishment of ceramics courses through a network of CAEs [Colleges of Advanced Education]. They did it just for the joy of spreading the word to others who wanted to learn...Those were the days of course, when someone like Ivan McMeekin returning from England with even just a few slides could fill a theatre with enthusiastic viewers. We were so keen to find out everything we could.[334]

None of the universities in Australia in the 1960s included practical art courses in the way that American universities did, where people like Peter Voulkos, who overturned traditional ceramic production practices, were able to develop their work within a particular kind of questioning and intellectual framework. However, by the 1970s Australians were increasingly exposed to people from this different background, and were affected by the freedom from tradition they espoused in their work. Peter Travis *(see Plate 13: following page)*, for example, who worked at San Jose College in the United States in 1969, said:

> The people I met in America were concerned with conceptual aspects of art, and with using crafts media as an extension of their art language...I felt released from the object for its material value; what is important is the act of learning while making: learning about self, about the material and about the environment.[335]

In a lecture for the Australian Society of Education through the Arts (ASEA) in Perth, in 1971, visitor Nicholas Vergette seemed to combine both educational points of view:

> To be meaningful', he said, 'the learning situation should call on our creative ability, our power of being aware sensitively. It should encourage our need to

[333]Ray Stebbins, RMIT course proposal (1984)
[334]Peter Rushforth *Craft Australia* 4 1978 15
[335]Peter Travis, in Gavin Souter 'Peter Travis' *Pottery in Australia* 13/1 1974

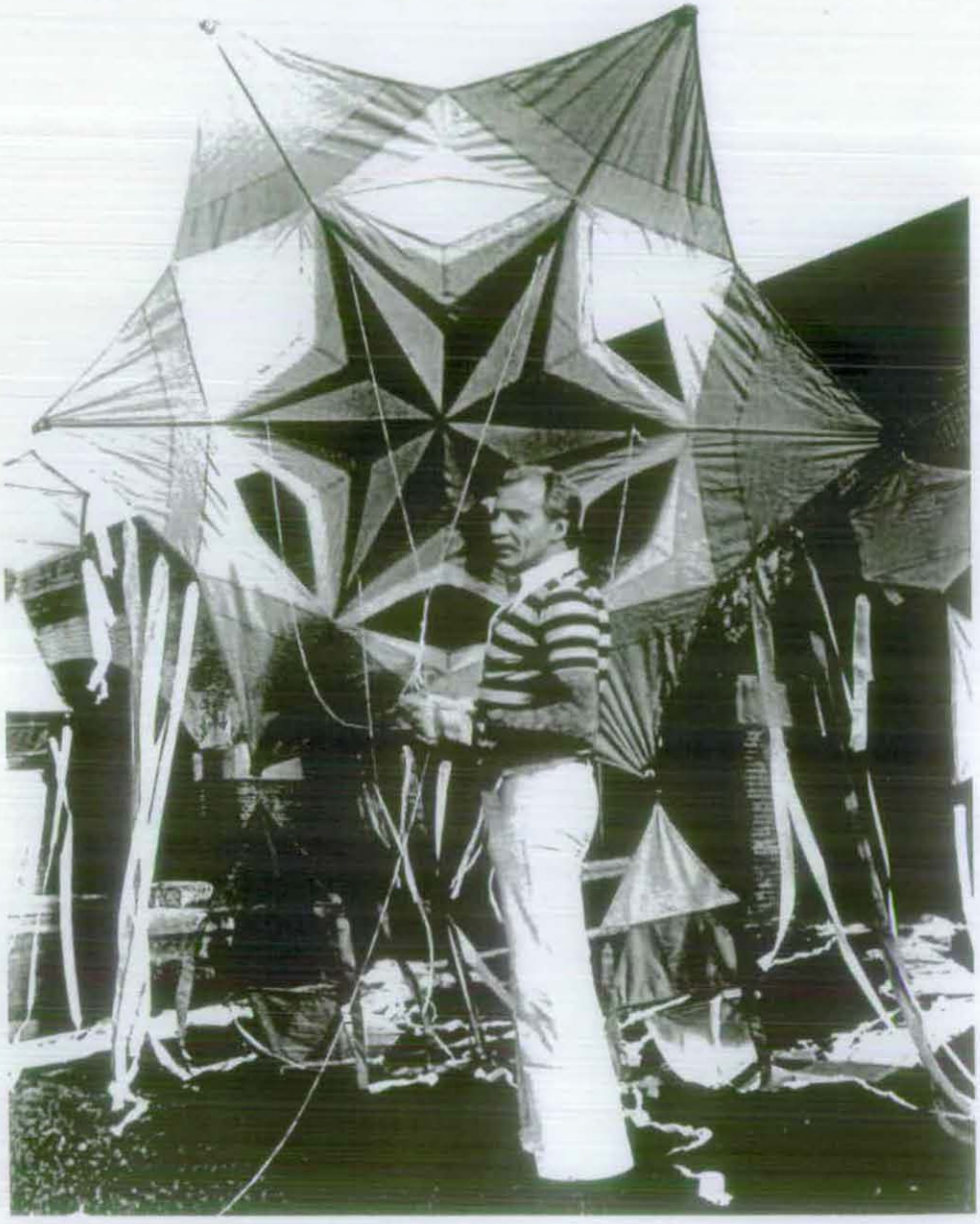

Plate 13: Peter Travis
(see page 120) Peter Travis tests a kite in Wentworth Park, Sydney, before his exhibition at David Jones Gallery in 1973.

Interested in the painting, but wanting to work also with light and movement, Peter Travis (b.1929) described these works as flying Colourfields: The tones and half-tones of colour, the reforming shapes and the vitality of movements would be impossible to achieve in anything other than a kite'. Trained as a designer, Peter Travis focused on ceramics and textiles from the 1960s. He became well-known for these huge kites which, by the 1980s had become complex aerial fabric installations for large buildings. Important for Travis was a 1969 visit to America: 'The people I met...were concerned with concept, about the material and about the environment.' In G. Souter *Pottery in Australia* 13/1 1974 tual aspects of art, and with using crafts media as an extension of their art language...I felt released from the object for its material value; what is important is the act of learning while making: learning about self, about the material and about the environment.' In G. Souter *Pottery in Australia* 13/1 1974

> express and imagine, it should reinforce our ability to reconstruct, reorganise and symbolise...we must not set up an hierarchy in art, with the high priest's chosen few, speaking a secret language the uninitiated cannot understand, scorning outsiders for their insensitivity, and deploring the ugliness which is being created in the environment. As teachers we must work for general participation and for a synthesis of our activities with the daily human experience. In this context I find the crafts so important in our education. They are still free of the overburdening legacy of high art.[336]

While the objective of personal development through the arts was generally included in the philosophy of technical college art departments, there tended to be more of a vocational emphasis on future self-sufficiency in the design departments. Amalgamations of institutions in the early 1970s were to juxtapose all philosophies, which were complicated still further by the strong interest in the fine arts themselves, in seeking the status, qualifications and resources of other disciplines. Colleges (or Institutes) of Advanced Education (CAEs), as more vocationally oriented alternatives to universities, developed from 1974 when the federal government took responsibility for funding both kinds of institution. CAEs now included art schools or art departments that had previously been part of technical colleges or teachers colleges. Often design schools and sometimes departments of teacher education were incorporated in the art schools, while in others all these departments remained separate. The CAEs worked towards establishing associate diploma, diploma and degree courses, and federal funding was put towards new buildings, equipment, resource centres and support staff.

The philosophy and experience of those such as Sir Misha Black undoubtedly influenced the setting up of parallel faculties of art and design in many Australian art schools in the 1970s. Over the past 15 years', he said, in the late 1970s, on his retirement from the Royal College of Art in London:

> ...I have oscillated like an erratic weather-cock, from the view that industrial design is a problem solving activity owing allegiance to engineering, to the opinion that its allegiance with the fine arts is as important as its allegiance with technology...now...I am sure that industrial design is a definable activity with specific attributes which distinguish it from engineering design, and that education for its profession can most effectively be conducted at colleges of art and design...I am not alone in shifting...[K]nowledge and method do not alone produce socially acceptable design solutions...If a conscious aesthetic is needed, then the education of industrial designers should continue to be taken in those institutions where aesthetics are daily bread, and not a confection prescribed by peripheral studies.[337]

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[336]Nicholas Vergette 'The Place of Crafts in Education' lecture to 4th National Biennial Assembly of the Australian Society of Education through the Arts (ASEA) Perth 1971.

[337]Sir Misha Black, paper on retiring from the Royal College of Art, c1976, publisher unknown; see also *The Misha Black Australian Papers* Dunhill Industrial Design Lectures, published by Trevor Wilson, Sydney 1970; 'The Axe or the Adze' *Crafts* July/Aug 1976.

The transfer of some of the art schools from 'the Techs' and teachers colleges into the Colleges of Advanced Education had mixed benefits. On the one hand, the amalgamations provided improved status for the CAEs, an increase in the number of courses and higher qualifications, as well as improved salaries, for staff. But for some courses it was also to mean, in the long-term and with further amalgamations, diminished resources and declining independence. For many others it meant relocation to new buildings on city outskirts and away from public involvement, which proved to be unpopular with staff and students as it was seen to remove the arts from everyday life.

The state-funded technical colleges became known as Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and, in contrast to the CAEs, directed their energies towards providing certificate courses, and also continued traditional trade apprenticeship training courses. The TAFE system was also to grow during the 1970s, receiving greater funding at this time than in earlier decades. The development of the TAFE system in Australia as a provider of craft education and training is perhaps exemplified by South Australia, which introduced craft certificate courses, with design as a compulsory subject, in 1973.[338]

David Williams's report, *Crafts Education and Training*, published in 1978,[339] documented the institutions of the time, and the courses and qualifications they offered. In trying to define the scope of crafts practice, in order to recommend where to place emphasis on funding and educational support, he identified five categories of crafts practice:

1. *Critical Productive* practice: craft production as a means of self-expression; the production of ideas.
2. *Social Vocational* practice: central to the crafts movement and concerned with the individual production of crafts as a vocation.
3. *Vocational/Industrial* practice: with long production runs; to do with design and production of prototypes.
4. *Social Avocational* practice: crafts as a hobby or leisure pursuit in the wider community; represents the majority of people, who draw inspiration from 1 and 2 above.
5. *Therapeutic* practice: remedial, educational-developmental and occupational therapy.

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[338]Tim Moorhead, a potter trained at the University of California, with potter and adminstrator Ben Kypridakis who had returned from the United States, was involved in this change. There were 36 part-time students at first and the Craft Certificate was offered in 2 colleges. When Moorhead left 4 years later, the Arts and Crafts Certificate was offered in 12 Colleges, and 2500 full-time students were studying ceramics, weaving, jewellery and leatherwork, often in association with trade courses, such as wool-classing, shoemaking and saddlery.

[339]This was a precursor to similar publications such as the Visual Arts Boards *Tertiary Visual Arts Education in Australia* in 1980, chair, Geoff Parr.

The Crafts Board itself placed top priority on the development of the individual practising professional in the first two categories, as these provided the small professional base that sustained the others. It was also responsive to objectives for access and participation, and for design for industry, and had encouraged training institutions to do the same. Later, as director of the Crafts Board, Williams summarised crafts education development in 1982:

> The need for special attention to areas traditionally not catered for in an art school context, such as glass, textiles, wood and leather was considered a priority. In many cases, Australia's leading craftspeople, themselves trained overseas, were invited to initiate professional courses, to plan and develop studio facilities and take part in course accreditation procedures. Their work has resulted in crafts specialisation being offered at certificate level at TAFE colleges and at diploma and degree level at Colleges of Advanced Education. These courses have provided most colleges with the basis for offering postgraduate diploma level study, and in a few cases masters degree studies.[340]

Art and craft education opportunities developed rapidly in both kinds of institutions, and a greater range and number of courses than ever before were available at all levels by the end of the 1970s.[341] Government-assisted mature-age entry schemes and the abolition of tertiary education fees brought many students back to tertiary training, and the strong community interest in extending personal skills and understanding resulted in a greater number of professional part-time courses. During this period of development, a great deal of part-time work was available for artists and craftspeople, which worked to mutual benefit for both them and the institutions, who liked students to have access to committed practitioners.

However, although art and design departments were usually located on the same campus, the links within some institutions were not always close, and crafts courses were taught in the art faculty in some schools, and in the design faculty in others. This division, complicated even further by the sometimes separate departments for art teacher education, served to perpetuate media and professional hierarchies, where art was more highly regarded than the crafts and where training as an artist had a higher status than training as an art teacher. The structures and relationships within institutions often reflected

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[340]David Williams, 'Australian College Work Supplement 1982' *Craft Australia* Autumn 1983 57

[341] In 1973 the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra provided the first national source of curriculum advice and resource materials. The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education sponsored a national seminar on tertiary art and art teacher education in 1974; the first such conference for 7 years, it attracted 75 delegates from 30 institutions. *Education and the Arts*, comprising 1 national and 8 state reports, was published in 1977 as a joint study of the Schools Commission and the Australia Council. In 1978 the 23rd World Congress of the International Society for Education through Art (INSEA), 'Arts in Cultural Diversity', was held in Adelaide: the Australian Society for Education through the Arts (ASEA), was active in the 1970s in most states, arguing for increased arts time in primary and secondary curricula, and the provision of integrated 'related arts' activities.

historical connections, funding sources and the personal preferences of those making decisions, rather than an educational philosophy, and the consequences were in most cases to further reinforce these hierarchies.[342] Bernard Smith seemed to have been a lone voice in the art world of the time, when he said, in 1975, 'If we abandon the distinction of art and craft in theory we should proceed to remove it in practice',[343] and similarly advocated that there should be no separate training for those planning to be teachers. In the 1980s, the connections grew much closer in some institutions, usually through the provision of common history, and later, theory courses.

Advocates for the crafts, wanting educational status as part of the status of the fine arts, had argued for their inclusion in art schools in the CAEs in the 1970s. But the visual arts at that time had moved away from materials and process-based ideals, and favoured either 'ideas-based' art practice, or public and community art works that made explicit political and social statements. Many lecturers in painting and sculpture were appointed to art schools who, favouring conceptual ideas, encouraged a 'de-skilling' in art, believing technical solutions could be found, if and when they were necessary.

While this was generally an opposite view to those teaching in crafts courses there was soon a marked increase in the adoption of this philosophy, resulting in the appointment of craftspeople with similar ideals as teachers. The production of 'sculptural' forms, and works expressing 'personal or social comment', in ceramics, textiles, glass, jewellery and metalwork was encouraged in these courses. The views of these key people were in turn reflected in funding decisions, recommendations for further institutional appointments, representation in collections and dealer galleries and in publications.

In later years, many lecturers - a number of visual arts and crafts areas - were to review these years as a time when 'a generation of students was lost', with regard to an appreciation and knowledge of, and training in, crafts skills and histories. The primacy placed on 'working with ideas' was very often not sustained by an understanding of the characteristics of the materials being used or the meanings associated with the forms and their functions that might be part of the histories of those media. Thus the ideas were often unresolved in practice.

The move of some crafts courses to CAEs and later, universities, clearly contributed to changes in the aims of crafts practice from that of a skill-based, design-oriented, audience-centred activity (that was still a means of personal expression) to the pursuit of crafts practice as an independent creative activity

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[342]From interviews with art school directors and staff (1986-1990). See also Geoff Hammond 'Art Education Ideologies, Current Emphasis in Australia' *Journal of Issues in Art Education* Institute of Art Education 5 3 Dec 1981

[343]Bernard Smith 'Art, Craft and the Community' (1975) in *The Death of the Artist as Hero* (1988) 53

that was closer to the ideals and aspirations of those practising the fine arts. Art programs now offered higher qualifications within university 'standards', and different ways of assessing success - ways that included greater 'intellectual' expectations which, in turn, by the mid-1980s, became more literal and theoretical.

This new orientation suited many, but disadvantaged those whose practice was based on the development of imagination and knowledge to do with design, form, materials and processes. It encouraged a 'lip-service' to the provision of an overt intellectual content where it may not have been appropriate or necessary.

Crafts centres

By contrast, educational, political and funding institutions also maintained a strong parallel commitment during the 1970s to the establishment of crafts centres, whose emphasis was less on pursuing art ideals and more on design and production towards small-workshop economic viability.

These centres provided models of professional crafts production and sometimes training associated with the ideal of a particular way of earning a living. But within the broad view, there were a number of different philosophical and economic reasons for setting up crafts centres, and different notions about what they were meant to do.

Many people were interested in enlarging, in city centres, on the example offered by rural workshops like those at Sturt, in Mittagong, which themselves were drawn from the models of crafts communities of the nineteenth century. Some took as a guide the crafts-based design workshops of Scandinavia, which had been used in turn as the model for the establishment of the Kilkenny workshops in Ireland.[344] Norwegian, Ragnar Hansen, and German, Frank Bauer, silversmiths who came to Australia in the early 1970s, had both spent some time at Kilkenny. For about ten years from the late sixties, many Australians interested in small design-based industry visited Kilkenny - almost as a pilgrimage.[345]

The main objective for those interested in the idea in Australia, was to set up small industries as part of a crafts and design-based economy, often allied with

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[344]The Kilkenny workshops were founded by the Irish Export Board in about 1966 in the castle stables of a small medieval town, in order to improve design of industrial products and increase Irish exports. Workshops in textile printing, weaving, ceramics, cast iron, silver, wood and furniture were set up, each with a designer in charge, to produce prototypes for production. They were based on the idea of the craftsperson-designer working with industry to make well-designed production lines, while having the opportunity to do their own work as well. They had a Scandinavian or European character because of the resident designers who were selected to work there.

[345]For example, delegates from the committees set up to establish the Jam Factory crafts workshops in Adelaide and the Salamanca Centre in Hobart, visited the Kilkenny workshops in the 1970s.

the current ideals of design theorists: Victor Papanek's notions of using appropriate technology, and Ernst Schumacher's 'small is beautiful' philosophy.[346] At the same time there was a liking for the idea that such products could give a country or a state (like Tasmania and South Australia, which particularly identified with the notion) an image of quality and integrity. This found its most successful form in the establishment of the Jam Factory Workshops in Adelaide in 1973, but was also, in varying degrees, behind many other ventures.

In practice, with worthy ideals and little experience, it proved to be very difficult to combine all the cultural, educational and economic objectives that were demanded, and this was further confused in some instances by equally worthy concerns to find useful purposes for saved and restored historic buildings, which were often in the wrong location, or could not be modified enough to be useful. At the Conference of Community and Cultural Centres in 1978 in Canberra, the administrators of fourteen of these centres took stock of each other's experiences to see what they could learn.[347]

There had been some precursors. From the establishment of the Workers Education Association (WEA) movement in the early 1900s, universities had supported arts activities for the community, although they were often most closely associated with theatre and music. In the early 1970s, the enthusiasm associated with the visual arts and crafts was so strong that workshops were set up in most major universities, usually organised by student unions. The most important example was the Tin Sheds Workshop at the University of Sydney, which was established in 1969 to be open to all students. The workshops here were run as a co-operative venture by students and staff (mostly from architecture and fine arts), and some resident artists.[348]

The Argyle Arts Centre was amongst the first of many centres that were later to develop in inner city buildings. One of the first development projects of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, established in 1968, the Centre's establishment was approved in 1970. Here, small shops and studios were set up in the old Argyle Stores, and a number of craftspeople became tenants.[349]

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[346]Victor Papanek *Design for the Real World* (1972); E F Schumacher *Small is Beautiful* (1973)

[347]At this stage some of the centres included Brown's Mart in Darwin, the Longreach Arts and Crafts Centre in Queensland, the Jam Factory Workshops in Adelaide, the Caulfield Arts Centre in Victoria, the Carclew Arts Centre in Adelaide, the ACT Crafts Centre, the Community and Arts Centre Foundation (later Salamanca Centre), the Ritchies' Mill Arts Centre and the Secheron Textile Centre, all in Tasmania, the Brisbane Community Arts Centre, the Melbourne Metropolitan Meat Market (later the Meat Market Crafts Centre), and the Corowa Arts and Crafts Centre in New South Wales.

[348]See Therese Kenyon, *Under a Hot Tin Roof: art, passion and politics at the Tin Sheds Art Workshop* (1995)

[349]One of the first was silversmith and jeweller Walraven van Heeckeren, whose shop was an adjunct to his St Leonards studio/school. Peter Brokensha's Primitive Art Gallery exhibited, among other works, Aboriginal arts and crafts.

Bernard Smith, author of Australia's most important contemporary visual arts histories at that time, also held strong ideas of the place of art, craft and teaching in society. With others in 1976, he established the Glebe Estate Workshop in Sydney to demonstrate their ideas about artists working in the community.

The Fremantle Arts Centre in Western Australia was established in 1973 when the 'Fremantle City Council recognised that art was not a calling or profession for a selected and gifted few but was something that should be available to everyone.'[350] In Hobart in the same year the sandstone warehouse at 63 Salamanca Place was developed as a community and arts centre. It provided the first artists studios, market stalls and meeting places in Hobart, before being burnt out some years later. However, other lobbies were mounted to persuade the state government to buy the Peacock Buildings, a row of old warehouses there, as a community and arts centre, later called the Salamanca Centre. It was thought that the buildings would provide a 'home' for crafts organisations, and that studios and workshops could provide a 'bridge' from art school. Others could see it as a base for community arts activities, and the government also entertained the idea of crafts and design-based production in the manner of the Kilkenny workshops. In due course, Kilkenny was inspected by Tasmanians as well.

In the early 1970s the Dunstan Labor government in South Australia was committed to social and cultural reform and development, and was also anxious to promote South Australia as a place where the quality of life was good, and its products distinctive. It had an associated interest in finding a way of using some of the local materials and resources, one of the most obvious being opals, to produce quality design-based commodities. After expeditions by Dick Richards (working at the Art Gallery of South Australia) and others to Kilkenny and Scandinavia, the South Australian Craft Authority was established in 1973, and it set up the Jam Factory Workshops in the old Mumzone Jams and Pickles factory in the St Peters suburb of Adelaide.[351]

The first chief executive of the South Australian Craft Authority was Simon Blackall, who remembers that the idea was to develop craft-based industry in

[350]Fremantle Arts Centre brochure (undated 1980s)

[351]The Jam Factory, with a brief to carry out both training and production, was virtually the sole project of the authority, and the authority became the Jam Factory in 1977. The first workshop was an access pottery studio, set up in 1974, and by 1978 there were also workshops in glass with Sam Herman, leather with Pietro Salemme, jewellery with Vagn Hemmingsen and textile design with Pru La Motte (then known as Medlin). A retail shop was established from the start and a wholesale department managed interstate marketing. By the 1990s, while it supported a gallery for changing exhibitions and while many of its employees retained an interest in making personal one-off art-craft items, it also operated a retail shop which marketed works interstate and overseas. The strength of the workshops remained in their ability to design and make, with semi-industrial technologies, for wider markets, including commissioned collaborative art and design projects for public places.

South Australia, but the authority thought that training should be offered first. He recalls:

> There was so little to work with; there were Milton Moon's first pottery graduates, but virtually no jewellers and just a few leather-workers; and a huge problem with supplies of materials. Hides were damaged, for example, and no one knew how to deal with the opals they hoped we could use. Added to that, the notion of training caused a furore; the education authorities then wanted to do that, and provide a certificate for it.[352]

The Jam Factory was not only an important training place for those who worked there: it also provided a model for other states and centres. But the enormous investment by the supportive state government was criticised at first by those elsewhere in the community who thought it might mean they would miss out on funding opportunities. It also showed how difficult it was to meet everyone's objectives, to educate and provide an image, and still produce for the economic welfare of the state.

In February 1992, now called the Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre, the organisation moved to a multi-disciplinary complex in the city. Its original objectives of offering training through production remained, but the balance between training and access had changed from time to time. Consistent with changes elsewhere, the Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre, as its new name reflected, consciously began to place more emphasis on the role of design in crafts practice. Trainees were recruited from backgrounds of working in product design or directly from design colleges. The Furniture and Design in Metal studios aimed not just to produce, but to design for production elsewhere, and to stimulate local design-based industry. This was seen as a way of creating a wider audience for craft design expertise through breaking free from high volume, low profit, manual batch production (although these areas, such as Ceramics, continued to finance the other workshops).

Lobbying to purchase the Metropolitan Meat Market as a craft centre in Melbourne started in 1974, and in 1977 the building was bought by the Victorian government. Marjorie Johnson, who had been involved in crafts development since the early 1970s, organised an exhibition there in 1978 as part of the festival, Arts Victoria '78: Crafts.[353] In April 1980 the centenary of the building was celebrated, and the main hall was used to exhibit both the Victorian State Crafts Collection which was started during the Arts Victoria '78: Crafts festival, as well as the first Australian Crafts '80 exhibition of 646 items from invited craftspeople round Australia. Thirty thousand people visited the month-long exhibition. At the opening, Premier Rupert Hamer expressed the philosophy of the time:

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[352] Interview with Simon Blackall (1986)

[353] The centre's identity was still obscure at that stage: when a carrier delivered one of Mark Thompson's ceramic works from Adelaide, labelled 'Meat Market', the carrier said 'There you are lady. It arrived last night but don't worry - we put it in cold storage.' Interview with Marjorie Johnson, 1986

> It has to be said that our primary objective here, has got to be to develop a centre which will focus on the most professional aspects of the crafts...we aim to display the best prevailing standards and to give encouragement and opportunity to craftsmen who have already reached a high standard of performance...the community can come here and see what constitutes fine craftsmanship.[354]

Aware of its location in a city with a number of art schools and a supportive government, the Meat Market Crafts Centre did not attempt to deal with initial training, but instead chose to offer extension experience through access to facilities, experienced practitioners and markets. It also sought to promote sales, and provide exhibition opportunities and a professional focus for craftspeople.[355] By the 1980s the Meat Market started to find ways of actively marketing crafts and design products.[356]

As a further example of the Victorian government's interest in developing professionalism and quality products in the crafts in the late seventies, it set up the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1976. Until that time, commissions for tapestries were usually sent to Aubusson in France. The workshop was set up in the Gloria Glove Factory, once a 'genteel emporium', in South Melbourne.[357] Walker chose artists who had already completed art school study, and she ran training courses in the workshop to teach them the skills of tapestry-weaving.

The tapestries made drew very largely on the work of contemporary painters, some of whom made paintings specifically for translation to tapestry, which raised controversy in various sections of the art and weaving communities. Criticism ranged from the use of commercial colours with commercial fibres (contrary to the prevailing 'natural' aesthetic), to questioning whether the workshop was merely 'copying' paintings rather than carrying out original woven works. Sue Walker emphasised that the works were collaborations, not copies, and that the weavers had to interpret the colours and textures in a new way, 'to invest the artist's original concept with the specific qualities of tapestry'.[358] This workshop provided the first formal professional training in

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[354]Jenny Zimmer *Craft Australia* 1980/4 14

[355] Access workshops were gradually established in textiles and ceramics (1982), cold glass, wood, metal and leather (1985), and hot glass (1988), each in the charge of a supervisor, where craftspeople could come to work, and a number of encouraging awards were associated with the workshops.

[356]In 1986 a range of products was taken to the United States to contribute to an Australian promotion by the Nieman Marcus store, and a Craft Export Agency was set up in 1988 as a twelve-month pilot consultancy, assisted by the Ministry for the Arts, to investigate the potential for the further export of Australian craftworks. See report in *Crafts Victoria* August 1989 13

[357] Director Sue Walker sought early advice from Canberra weaver Belinda Ramson, who had worked at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh with tapestry weaver Archie Brennan, and eventually from Brennan himself, who was working at the Australian National University in 1976.

[358]Sue Walker *Tapestry and the Australian Painter* (1978)

tapestry weaving in Australia. Many of the weavers left to work independently, thus creating an opportunity for others to train, and others established further tapestry weaving classes, for example, at Warrnambool in the 1980s.

Twenty years later, most of these centres remain, although those that do have had to refocus from time to time to meet changing political and financial circumstances, and changing public taste. Some, like the Argyle Arts Centre, before it closed in the 1990s, became more a collection of tourist hobby-shops rather than a serious reflection of contemporary concerns. Others, like the Jam Factory and the Meat Market, began in the 1980s to reflect the prevailing wider shifts in ideals that inlcuded an emphasis on access to professional facilities and/or on design for production, sometimes elsewhere.

Aboriginal crafts workshops

Significantly, for Aboriginal people who traditionally made no distinction between art and craft and their relation to cultural and ceremonial traditions, the model of the viable crafts workshop was found to be the most appropriate way of working for what was to become an increasingly important cultural and economic art/craft industry for Aboriginal people from the 1970s.

Those involved in the contemporary crafts movement were supportive not only of the traditional aspect of Aboriginal cultural development, but also of the perceived opportunities for Aboriginal communities to develop viable art-based industries, combining aspects of traditional concerns with the philosophies and practices of the contemporary crafts movement. These philosophies included the notions of using local and natural materials for making useful items, and the objective of working towards personal expression and economic self-sufficiency.

By the 1960s, the valuing of Aboriginal artefacts as part of Aboriginal cultural expression had taken two forms. The first was a recognition by some art historians, of a place in art history for Aboriginal art on its own terms and with its own cultural meanings (rather than only as ethnographic artefacts), and the second was a realisation that arts and crafts could provide an economic activity for Aboriginal people, especially those living in isolated places.[359]

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[359]How this might take place was rather confused by an uncertainty of whether the work should be associated with art galleries or museums, and, associated with this, whether authentic Aboriginal art could be only 'frozen' traditional forms, or could change, according to the changing circumstances and interests of its makers. Writing of the Melville Island burial posts shown in the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1959, Douglas Stewart thought that while 'they have definite artistic merit of an elementary kind, [they] are really more in the nature of ethnological curiosities than works of art', while James Gleeson said, 'whatever their symbolic significance might be they represent an ensemble of abstract shapes of considerable aesthetic appeal'. Cited by Tony Tuckson in 'Aboriginal Art and the Western World' in R. M Berndt (ed) *Australian Aboriginal Art* (1964). Tuckson himself recognised that 'an Aboriginal artist's attitude is related to his totemic spiritual life, and his

In 1964 anthropologist Ronald Berndt had noted the varying success of the use of European media by Aboriginal artists,[360] and also observed the ways in which some traditional crafts were being made at that time for a commercial market, encouraged by some missions and settlements, and with Europeans acting in varying degrees as agents. He noted that the 'quality control' was not always good, as agents and purchasers were unsure of appropriate standards, feeling it was 'not necessary for work to have meaning', and much work was being directed by European taste.[361]

At that time, the contemporary crafts movement was gaining momentum throughout Australia. It represented a way of carrying out small production to make a living as part of an almost zealous belief that the value of what they believed in could and should be shared. In the spirit of the World Crafts Council, the crafts were seen as a uniting force for the peoples of the world.

Given all these strands, it was inevitable that those in the crafts movement and its organisations should find some elements in common with the contemporary development of Aboriginal arts and crafts. The crafts movement's enthusiasm to pass on its philosophies was a direct practical and philosophical influence on the development of arts-based workshops in Aboriginal communities, providing a professional model for the sometimes previously existing mission crafts workshops (although the crafts movement was more supportive of the use of traditional symbolism and meanings). In keeping with the philosophies of the broad World Crafts Council membership, the crafts movement in Australia was supportive of both integrating Aboriginal crafts and craftspeople into its own infrastructure, while encouraging the development of self-determination.

At the same time, Aboriginal people, especially in remote centres, found that the opportunity to develop secular versions of ritual and symbolic forms and practice for an external audience, contributed not only to local educational needs, but also to a necessary economic self-sufficiency - in somewhat the same way that the crafts movement had idealised.[362]

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conception of the world around him. His art is subjective, symbolic, based on knowledge rather than visual appearances.' Tony Tuckson in R. M Berndt (ed) *Australian Aboriginal Art* ibid (1964) 73

[360] R. M Berndt ibid (1964) 73. Berndt cited especially the skill and popularity of painter Albert Namatjira and the Aranda (now Arrernte) watercolour school at Hermannsburg

[361] As well as bark painting, this work included the making of 'carved and incised boards, spearthrowers, boomerangs, shields, and in some areas, pearl-shells, boabab nuts, emu-feather shoes or feathered baskets'. European taste included less abstraction and more figurative images of hunters, as long as there was less specific detail of genitalia and fertility images. R M Berndt ibid (1964) 73.

[362] In 1971 the men associated with the school at the remote Papunya settlement in the Western Desert of Central Australia, began to participate in a mural project, painting in the style of traditional sand or rock drawings to the community. Teacher Geoff Bardon encouraged the men to tell their stories or Dreamings (ancestral beings or places whose spirits are passed on to their descendants) in this way, and at first paintings were created on anything that

Over the next decades a number of programs and schemes attempted to help local Aboriginal economies through trying to both preserve traditional work and processes, and find appropriate associated or new crafts-based industries. Little was known at first of the benefits, problems and patterns associated with both spontaneous and assisted changes and developments, the effects on cultural values, the ways such activities can reactivate an interest in tribal history, or the way in which they can bring other cultural issues to the attention of the wider world.[363]

By the time the Aboriginal Arts Board was established within the Australia Council in 1973, a number of important initiatives had already taken place through which the federal government aimed to support the development of Aboriginal arts.[364] These developments were also associated with strong political moves away from an ideal of 'assimilation', as it had been practised, and towards Aboriginal self-determination, which was accompanied by a resettlement of Aboriginal 'homelands'. Emphasis was placed on preserving and reviving traditional cultural practices, and also on the creation of viable industries for artists, some of which were in non-traditional media. Those who worked with Dr Coombs believed that this was a historic turning point.[365]

The Crafts Council of Australia was established in 1971 with, amongst its supporters, designer and teacher Mary White, and also Ivan McMeekin, who had established the Bagot Pottery for Aboriginal trainees in Darwin in 1968, advised by British potter Michael Cardew who had set up similar projects in East Africa. Because of its interest, its constitution - and its accountant - the

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came to hand - linoleum, masonite or pieces of wood. Fast-drying acrylic paints were soon introduced and Bardon and his successor Peter Fannin, who introduced canvas to the artists, acted as the supplier of materials, and then the seeker of markets. This painting, however, as Tim and Vivien Johnson point out, was also 'a development *within* Aboriginal culture for its own purposes'. See Tim and Vivien Johnson *The Painted Dream* (1991) 9, 13

[363]The production of 'transitional art' amongst indigenous cultures was not peculiar to Australia; the development of Inuit soapstone carving and the changing designs of Navajo weaving in the United States are two of many similar histories, and were of interest to the crafts movement. See Erik Cohen in Kirsten Wickman (ed) *Craft Reports from all Around the World* (1988)

[364]Dr H. C. Coombs, the first chair of the Australian Council for the Arts from 1969, was also chair of the Aboriginal Arts Advisory Committee from 1970. He had a particular commitment to this area, as did Dr Jean Battersby and a project officer, Jennifer Isaacs. The federal government's Department of Aboriginal Affairs was established in 1972; both bodies allocated funds for arts activities and a number of joint funding programs were set up.

[365]Interview, Jennifer Isaacs, 1986. The federal government had accepted national responsibility for Aboriginal concerns only a few years before, in 1968, and some states did not consider it in their interests to relinquish their control of Aboriginal people. Between 1969 and 1973, Jennifer Isaacs was one whose task was to assess the situation and discover what might be needed. Moves towards Aboriginal self-determination and cultural identity appeared to be seen as threats to development, and the travels of the staff of the Australia Council were often monitored by state officials.

Crafts Council of Australia provided one of the most appropriate arts frameworks through which funds from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Australian Council for the Arts, and from 1973 the Aboriginal Arts Board could be directed to Aboriginal projects in all Aboriginal art forms. This arrangement lasted until 1979.[366]

As part of these developments, Mary White was appointed craft adviser to the Australian Council for the Arts in 1971 (and later to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs) to explore the potential of developing the crafts in Aboriginal communities. Her emphasis was on the use of traditional skills, materials and techniques to develop a range of 'adapted' crafts enterprises for both economic development and cultural fulfilment.[367] The Crafts Council assisted with projects that took craftspeople to work on projects with Aboriginal groups.

One of the most important initiatives of the Aboriginal Arts Board was the employment of crafts advisers in Aboriginal communities to assist in the day-to-day organisation of work, and help with supplies and marketing. Such enterprises were generally run as community co-operatives, and by 1979-80 twenty such enterprises were being funded.[368] Many of these had their origins as workshops initiated by missions, such as those at Ernabella in South Australia, Hermannsburg in Central Australia and at Nguiu on Bathurst Island. Many more developed during the 1970s and 1980s.[369] Others, as at Utopia in Central Australia, developed when homelands were returned to the traditional owners in the late 1970s. The extent to which Aboriginal cultural content was encouraged, in what were often new forms and media, varied according to the abilities and the philosophies of those who taught them.

The crafts infrastructure's involvement in the development of Aboriginal crafts and art workshops in the 1970s was central to what was to become, in the 1980s and 1990s, a very large and lucrative, and sometimes controversial, 'arts industry'. This development was to take place in a Western art market that made clear distinctions between art and craft, regardless of the cultural origin of the work itself. Aboriginal cultural objects, often presented in non-

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[366]Interviews with Jane Burns 1986-87, past general manager of the Crafts Council of Australia. One of the first events organised by the Aboriginal Arts Board was a national meeting in May 1973 of 300 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people interested in Aboriginal cultural development. Many of the resolutions from this meeting became the charter for the new board.

[367] In 1972 White was working with twelve settlements, including Amata in northern South Australia, Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory and Mowanjum and Jigalong in Western Australia. Some of the arts activities encouraged were batik, weaving, pottery and leatherwork, as well as the continuation of traditional work for a market elsewhere. It was apparent in most cases that training was better carried out in the communities rather than by bringing people to city centres and schools. Mary White archives, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

[368]See *Annual Reports* Australia Council 1975/76 23; 1979/80 19

[369]See summary of workshops in Aboriginal communities in Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) chapters 4, 6, 8

traditional new media, rapidly separated into 'art' and 'craft' once they hit the markets of the Western art world, and the Western distinctions experienced by other Australian craftspeople were soon applied. The distinctions made by the marketplace, determined by art ideals, were to eventually place higher values on, for example, paintings and prints rather than batik and baskets. Artists like Emily Kame Kngwarreye, who started making batik at Utopia in the late 1970s, shifted to painting around 1988 and became one of Australia's most well-known and respected contemporary artists by the mid-1990s. *(see Plate 14: following page).*

Rather than finding itself challenged by the anomalous relationship of art and craft in this circumstance, the crafts movement tended to welcome the situation of 'equality' between art and craft as one in which it believed, and itself sought to have acknowledged.

The marketplace

By the mid-1970s the crafts had a large, enthusiastic audience. The 1960s and 1970s saw the establishment of hundreds of crafts shops and galleries throughout Australia, often in cities and suburbs, but also in small towns and on tourist routes, where craftspeople had gone to set up studios and make a living through selling through their local outlet. Many of these shops and galleries were undiscerning in terms of the quality of the items they sold, but they celebrated the products of a way of life to a sympathetic and often similarly undiscerning public.

One of the main solutions for professional craftspeople to counter perceptions of amateurism was to seek closer connections with dealer art galleries. But while many of these galleries encouraged quality functional wares, the interest for most by the late 1970s was in art that did not value crafts traditions. This provided a further incentive for craftspeople to pursue art ideals.

Thus, both exemplary functional wares (like the ceramics of Les Blakebrough, Col Levy and Gwyn Hanssen-Pigott, and jewellers Larsen and Lewers), and sculptural works that drew on their own material and functional traditions, were accommodated in the programs of dealer galleries. The latter included exhibitions of 'art-craft' works like Ewa Pachucka's crocheted figures at Rudy Komon's gallery in 1977 *(see Plate 12: before page 108)*, Mark Thompson's ceramic figures at Bonython's in Adelaide in 1975 and Joan Grounds's ceramic parcels at Watters Gallery in 1971. Marea Gazzard's and Mona Hessing's Clay + Fibre exhibition of ceramics and textiles, which successfully crossed both crafts traditions and sculpture of the time, challenged the values of both artists and craftspeople at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1973.

A crucial number of specialist galleries and shops also maintained a professional attitude to what they were showing and why they were doing it,

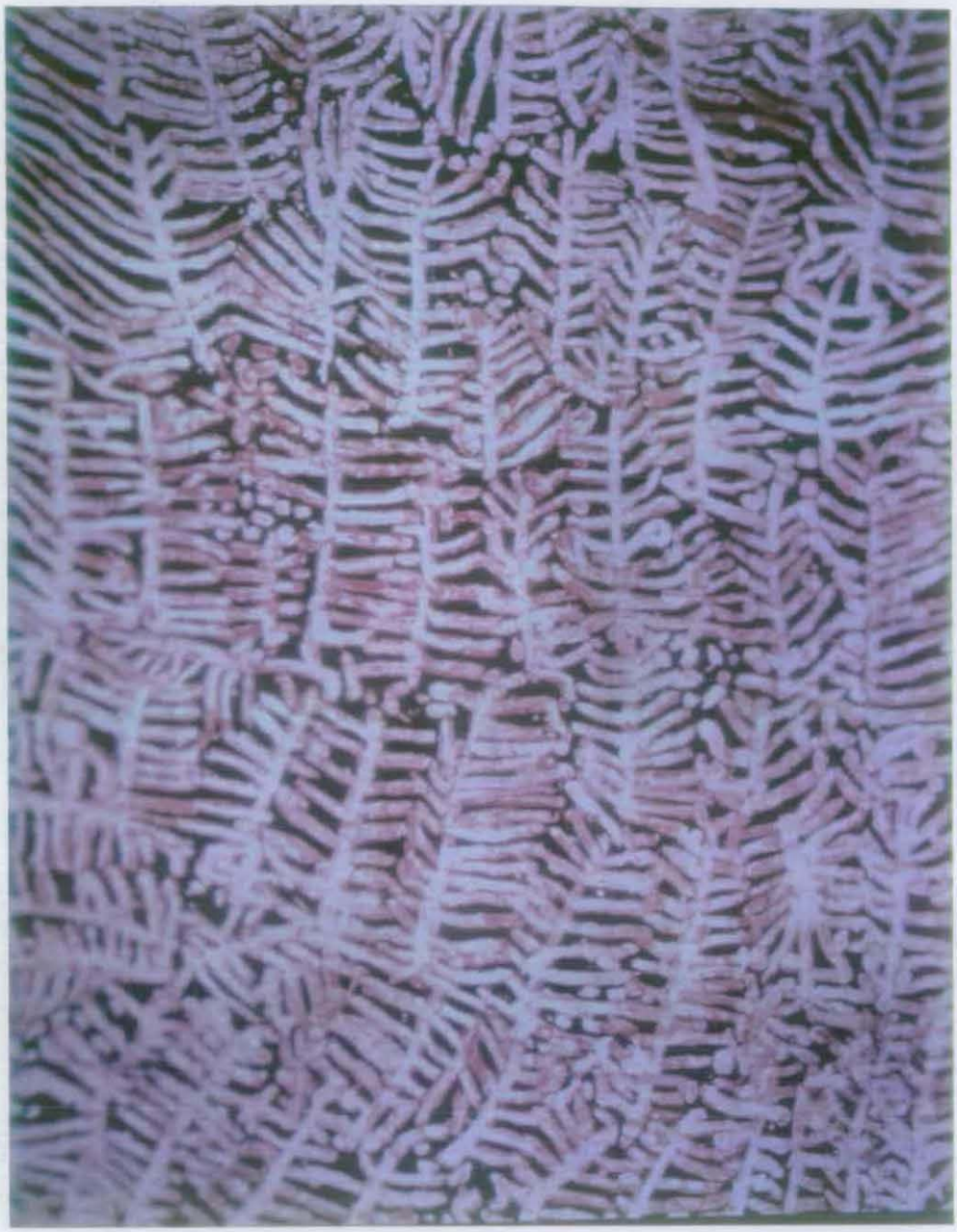

Plate 14: Emily Kame Kngwarreye
(see page 134) Textile length, *Untitled*, silk batik made at Utopia, Central Australia in 1988. (180 x 90cm)

Emily Kame Kngwarreye (d.1997) was one of the senior women at the Utopia homelands, a cattle station returned to traditional owners in 1977. The women learned to make batik in the late 1970s and were introduced to acrylic painting and printmaking in the late 1980s. Kngwarreye became the most famous and 'collectable' - especially for her painting - of all the very significant artists at Utopia. Her work is represented in all state and national art collections and was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1997. Her work was always an affirmation of her relationship to her country.

From the early 1970s, the crafts movement supported Aboriginal people to develop secular versions of ceremonial art (like body and ground painting) for an external audience, for educational needs and economic self-sufficiency - in the same way that the crafts movement had idealised. These cultural forms rapidly separated into 'art' and 'craft' once they hit the markets of the Western art world, and the distinctions experienced by other craftspeople were soon applied.

and tried to establish a professional profile for crafts practice, and an educational role for the public. One of the earliest private galleries to deliberately address itself to looking and operating like a crafts gallery rather than a shop was potter Ian Sprague's Craft Centre in Melbourne which opened in Melbourne in 1964.[370] Having practised as an architect in Australia, Sprague then studied pottery in London, and visited the Craft Centre of Great Britain frequently. On returning to Melbourne in 1962 he 'found that nothing comparable existed...nowhere could one find any of high standard, worthily displayed, without the clutter of bad or mediocre work'. In choosing a name, he tried 'to avoid the word "craft", because some sort of stigma seemed to be associated with it. In those days it smacked of pressed wildflowers, shell pictures and church bazaars.' At first he considered the name Amphora, and made a large one to put in the window on opening day, but ultimately decided to stay with the word craft, 'since only the best was to be displayed...maybe the word would be enhanced'.[371]

With his stress on high quality, Sprague turned many prospective exhibitors away. 'I was particularly anxious that the Craft Centre become known to designers, architects and interior decorators as a place where there requirements could be met...but it was far too early for this sort of thing.' To attract people, Sprague held soireés every second Friday:

> ...where the "cognoscenti" could gather to discuss the finer points of art and craft reinforced by wine and cheese...all sorts of ruses were used to make people relate to the craftwork; loaves of bread and wedges of cheese sat on boards and plates; dried branches twisted from vases, and discarded fruit from the nearby fruitshop was placed in bowls.[372]

Accounts from those who were involved at the time give an idea of the excitement that handmade craftworks provoked, and the context in which they were received. For example, from 1967 Rie Heymans set up the Old Firestation Gallery in Perth because:

> ...in the sixties the state gallery was not doing anything; there was a crying need for someone to take risks. Craft shows always sold; everyone was always drinking out of great heavy mugs. It all coincided with growing vegies and living at Margaret River...looking back at the early jewellery and ceramics, some was pretty lumpy![373]

The Collectors Gallery was established in Subiaco in Perth in the early 1970s by Dr Rose Toussaint, a practising psychiatrist who enjoyed collecting art. Curator Robert Bell observed that:

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[370]After spending a year establishing his studio at Upper Beaconsfield, Ian Sprague leased premises for a gallery in 1964 at 407 Toorak Road, South Yarra.

[371]Ian Sprague 'History of the Craft Centre' (unpublished) Crafts Council of Australia Sydney 1986

[372]Ian Sprague op cit (1986)

[373]Interview with Rie Heymans (1986)

> ...jewellery at that time included great chunks of iron ore and quartz crystal. Dr Rose Toussaint was an important patron, and showed jewellery along with other crafts, wearing much of the larger and spectacular jewellery herself to great effect.[374]

One of the most entrepreneurial crafts galleries in Sydney was Aladdin's Gallery in Elizabeth Bay, established in the mid-sixties by Margaret Eady and Tom Bolster. They were amongst the first to introduce Asian crafts, such as fabrics, rugs, jewellery, sculpture, pots and wooden vessels to Sydney, and also encouraged Australian craftspeople through providing a venue for exhibitions and sales. As well as numerous similar key outlets[375] were the galleries and spaces set up in each state by the Crafts Councils and various specialist groups like potters societies.

Aboriginal art and craft had been collected or commissioned for many decades by anthropologists, museum personnel and private collectors, and some small galleries.[376] In the seventies new initiatives for marketing work were encouraged, very much in line with what was happening in the craft world.[377] Probably the first major exhibition of Aboriginal crafts to tour overseas was the Art of the Aboriginal Australian, organised by Mary White working with all the interested funding and managing bodies. It toured, with Aboriginal artists, to nine Asian countries in 1973-74.[378]

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[374]Interview with Robert Bell (1986)

[375]Others established the 1960s included Aldgate Crafts in Adelaide, Marj Richey's Coach-house Gallery in Melbourne, Betty Beaver's Narek Gallery in Canberra, and in Tasmania there was Alice Krongaard's Saddlers Court Gallery, and from 1972, the Bowerbank Mill Gallery set up by Gail and Garry Greenwood. For a detailed list see Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) chapters 3, 4, 6.

[376]Some collectors, like Jim Davidson, through his Aboriginal and Pacific Art Gallery in Melbourne from 1961, Stephen Kellner in Sydney from the early sixties and Robert Ypes in Sydney from 1965, sold tribal art, including Aboriginal art. Also in Sydney, Aladdin's Gallery from the sixties, and from 1974 the Gallery of Dreams in the Hogarth Galleries sold Aboriginal art.

[377]The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, through the Aboriginal Enterprises Fund, which aimed to encourage Aboriginal industries, set up Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd in 1971, largely to establish a gallery and marketing outlet in Alice Springs, as well as outlets in other capital cities. Mary White directed much of her energy towards this, and in late 1974 the Centre for Aboriginal Arts and Crafts in Alice Springs was opened by Dick Roughsey, chair of the Aboriginal Arts Board. For some time the company Aboriginal Arts and Crafts operated from Canberra: branches were opened in other states and in 1984 this organisation became known for a short time as Inada Holdings, before being renamed Aboriginal Arts Australia. Interviews with Jane Burns, 1986-87, and Ace Burke, 1986.

[378]See Patricia Thompson *Craft Australia* 2 1 1972 7. Aboriginal work was also included in the Australian pavilion at the World Fair at Spokane in the United States in 1974, and this exhibition, with dancers and artists, continued to Toronto for the World Crafts Council Conference later that year. Many other exhibitions and performing groups were sent overseas during the seventies, and some collections of Aboriginal art were presented to overseas museums, such as to the Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand during the South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1976.

Those active in the professionalisation of the crafts movement were often as keen to make connections with 'design' as they were to 'art'. In the late 1960s, for example, the gallery of the Design Centre in Sydney was used by the Craft Association of Australia (New South Wales branch) for its annual exhibitions. Design showrooms had developed in the 1960s, following the lead of people like Frances Burke and Fred Ward in Melbourne in the 1940s. A similar design and decorating business was that of Marion Hall Best in Sydney, which she had founded in 1939 in Queen Street, Woollahra, later moving to Rowe Street until her retirement in 1974. In an obituary in 1988 it was recalled that she 'hated beige'; she is remembered for the daring and innovative way she brought colour to interiors through glazed walls and ceilings, screenprinted textiles such as those of Marimekko, and Indian cottons woven to her own designs. She introduced Japanese grass wallpapers, Italian ceramics and contemporary American furniture to Sydney,[379] and also included the furniture of Australian designers like Gordon Andrews and Clement Meadmore in her interiors.

The imported contemporary designs and the few similar commissioned local products had had a strong effect on the postwar domestic environment. Every major city could identify at least one key person who opened up this new world. David Foulkes-Taylor (1929 -1969) in Perth exemplifies the various links that were made nationally and internationally at the time. Foulkes-Taylor had gone to school at Geelong Grammar, where the head, James Darling, was committed to the ideals of Fabian Liberalism, 'giving sons of the privileged a sense of commitment and caring for those less fortunate'.[380] Foulkes-Taylor returned to Western Australia from London in 1954 at the beginning of the mining boom that was to change Perth.

He set up his Taylormade showrooms in 1956, with the small Triangle Gallery as an exhibition space for himself and others. He not only showed imported products, but also designed and made furniture from local timbers. Before this time it was very difficult for local artists to find venues to show their work. Foulkes-Taylor's energies were put initially into the visual arts, but when the Skinner Galleries were established, he concentrated, as an alternative, more on interior design. Modernist ideas were filtering in through journals, books and, most importantly, people, and his was one of the few places that provided a sympathetic surrounding with a regular clientele of interested buyers. Foulkes-Taylor introduced seagrass matting, cane blinds, jarrah furniture, Arabia dinner sets and Marimekko fabrics.

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[379] *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 July 1988

[380] His art teacher was Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack, who had worked at the Bauhaus school in Germany and had escaped with its founder Walter Gropius to England before the war. In 1947 Foulkes-Taylor studied at the School of Architecture at the Perth Technical College, then continued with Industrial Design at the London Central School. His involvement during this time of change in British design made him interested in the marketing and presentation of products. Pat Duffy (ed) *The Foulkes-Taylor Years* (1982) 15

Entry in award exhibitions became an important part of the professional practice for many, because they were often associated with exhibitions at conferences where the work could be discussed by peers, and usually also meant that the award-winner's work would be acquired for a major collection. The kind of work selected for exhibition and award reflected the point of view of the selectors and judges and their particular orientation towards art or design. In some cases collections developed with no coherent policy or pattern because of the diversity of opinion. Ceramics awards such as the Mayfair Ceramics Award, and the Fletcher-Brownbuilt Ceramic Award are specific examples of the extraordinary support provided this area of the crafts by industry, through a number of collections and awards that started in the 1970s.[381] As well as participating in opportunities in Australia, craftspeople had also submitted work to important international competitions as well, most notably the ceramic competition at Faenza in Italy, and the tapestry exhibition at Lausanne in Switzerland. By the eighties opportunities for ceramics and textiles had expanded, and many people were also participating in other major national and international metalwork and jewellery, glass, paper and design events.[382]

The number of craftspeople receiving commissions for work in public buildings had also increased slowly during the 70s, encouraged somewhat by the Crafts Board's incentive schemes, and by efforts of Crafts Councils through a number of exhibitions that attempted to bring architects and craftspeople together.[383] Over the years, a number of attempts had been made to interest architects and planners in considering the inclusion of commissioned craftworks in their buildings. In the early 1960s this had been Ian Sprague's hope, for example, when he opened the Craft Centre in Melbourne, but despite the involvement of designers and architects on the early Crafts Council committees, most architects of those times preferred their buildings to be purely architectural statements. Special exhibitions had been planned to make such connections.[384]

Funding opportunities provided by the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, combined with the management infrastructure of the Crafts Council of Australia, meant that exhibitions could be developed and toured within Australia and overseas. Influential exhibitions were also brought from overseas, and it is significant that in the early eighties most of the key

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[381] In 1973 the annual Bendigo Pottery Award for established potters was established, having started in 1971 to encourage local pottery students. Australians also entered in the annual New Zealand Fletcher-Brownbuilt (later Fletcher-Challenge) ceramic award. The Mayfair Ceramics Award, 1976-1987, was sponsored by the company, Mayfair Hams and Bacons.

[382] Crafts Council of Australia *Recurrent International Events* 1991

[383] See Grace Cochrane op cit (1992) chapter 6 for a summary of commissions in the 1970s.

[384] For example, the Living Space by the Crafts Council of Victoria and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victoria) in 1976; Craftworks in Australian Architecture by the Crafts Board and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (NSW) in 1984; and Working Together in Architecture at the Meat Market in 1988.

exhibitions to tour were art rather than production oriented. They included Image and Idea (British ceramics, 1980), International Directions in Glass Art (1982) and Fabric and Form (British textile art, 1982), as well as Cross Currents, organised in Australia in 1984 and which included jewellery from Australia, Holland, Germany and Great Britain.

Meanwhile, the main collections of Australian decorative arts were held in each of the state art museums and some history museums.[385] Collections of post-war contemporary crafts were generally acquired in the context of fine arts and historical decorative arts collections in art museums.[386] A number of new regional galleries were established throughout Australia during the sixties and seventies, and in many of these were also to establish specialist craft collections.[387]

In most cases decades had elapsed since contemporary crafts or decorative arts had been acquired for state collections, and a national gallery, in Canberra, was not to open until 1982. During the late 1970s purchases began to be made again, the new interest being largely tied to a marked increase from 1978 in curatorial appointments in the decorative arts, or crafts, a measure of the broader acceptance of and interest in contemporary crafts practice.[388] Acquisitions into these collections from this time generally reflect 'the best' of what was offered, across the range of practice.[389] It appears that specialist crafts curators valued the best functional works alongside the best 'art-craft'

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[385]In some states decorative arts collections are divided across neighbouring institutions, for example, the Art Gallery of Western Australia holds the collections of decorative arts and crafts - except for important holdings of jewellery by James W.R. Linton, which is held in the museum next door.

[386]Sometimes, in smaller centres like Darwin and Hobart, these combined collections were also linked to natural and social history museums. At the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney the crafts were part of a historical decorative arts collection that was linked to science, technology and social history rather than art.

[387]Shepparton, for example, concentrated on ceramics from 1973, the Ararat Gallery similarly started specialising in a textile collection through Biennial acquisition exhibitions from about 1974, and in 1975 the Tamworth National Fibre Exhibition was initiated. In the 1980s other special collections were set up: for example Wagga Wagga in glass, Toowoomba in jewellery, Manly in ceramics, and Hamilton in metalwork.

[388]At the National Gallery of Victoria, acquisitions by Kenneth Hood from 1950s and later Terence Lane and others in the 1970s; Carl Andrew in Hobart and John McPhee in Launceston in the 1970s; Daniel Thomas in the 1970s for the Australian National Gallery's opening in the 1980s, and John McPhee as curator of decorative arts from 1980. The Art Gallery of Western Australia appointed Robert Bell specifically as curator of craft in 1978; the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston later created a similar position, held by Janet Floyed and later Glenda King. Glenn Cooke was appointed as the first curator of decorative arts Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1982. Meanwhile, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney made intermittent acquisitions during the seventies, and greatly increased its decorative arts staffing to about 10 on reopening as the Powerhouse Museum in 1988.

[389]These comments are made from a personal knowledge of the holdings of state and many regional crafts collections, based on inspections, catalogues and constant collaboration with curators.

works, perhaps because they were informed about both the processes and the histories involved in contemporary practice, and saw the crafts as a continuum of those histories.

However, until the 1980s, display in these galleries was rarely integrated with fine arts displays; the crafts or decorative arts works were generally exhibited in separate spaces. It was those craftspeople making art-craft who sometimes, themselves, sought to be included not just in crafts collections and exhibitions, but in the context of the fine arts - not adjacent to it, but part of it. These people would have liked, for example, their decorative objects to be considered as sculpture in art survey shows like Australian Perspecta, and art biennales like the Sydney and Adelaide biennales.

It was here, where fine arts curators were involved, and with very few exceptions, that the art world drew a line.

Effect of pursuing art ideals

Popularity of the crafts

From the beginning of the 1970s, patrons and practitioners who were denied objects in an art world that now often focused on 'non-object' works, appeared to find them in the crafts - whether functional or non-functional - and demonstrated a continuing interest in works that were made with a concern for finish, form, process, permanence and a sense of human scale.

The ideals of crafts practice, in all its forms, were supported enthusiastically in Australia, not only by crafts practitioners, but also by a general public who wanted to be associated with those ideals through collecting and using its products. Public interest and participation was so evident that the institutions of the art world altered to accommodate the crafts. Art schools introduced more crafts courses; galleries and museums began to show and collect craftworks more consistently; design centres formed links with the crafts organisations; publications began to appear; and special crafts centres were established by governments.

However, the popularity and accessibility of the crafts could also be identified as self-defeating. It was increasingly realised that the movement's small professional core (which took longer to train) was not growing as fast as the vast amateur movement (which seemed to be satisfied with training comparatively quickly). This was probably largely due to the success of the crafts movement itself, through the new opportunities provided by crafts courses and the proliferation of shops selling the products of amateur producers. The perception of crafts practice and its products, and even the word itself, were increasingly seen to have been devalued by such popularity.

In 1978, speaking at the first national glass conference, Cedar Prest summarised of this most recent development in studio crafts, comments that could have applied to all areas:

> We are currently producing a flood of eager semi-trained practitioners who are working for a public more ignorant than themselves. We started with an historical background of poor design and we are seeing no improvement with the present revival. We need to take a hard look at both the systems of production now operating and be honest in realising that they cannot bring us any glass art. We need a better system based on the prerequisites that our craftsmen should have a sound design background as well as good technique in their chosen area of glass and that they should be working for people able to recognise a piece of good glass when they see it.[390]

Seeking status

Despite the close connections held by many to the idea and status of 'design', craftspeople were still reluctant to identify too closely with industry. In any case, those industries that remained, after the closures in the 1960s of many ceramics, glass and textile industries, were reluctant to employ Australian designers because of the costs of retooling equipment, the risk of new designs and the cheaper solution of bringing in, or copying, designs from overseas.

Exhibitions in dealer art galleries provided a good solution for professional craftspeople who wanted their work to be viewed as individual objects in the 'detached' context of art, separating them both from the amateur works in many craft shops and from an association with industry. However, while some galleries certainly showed functional wares by leading practitioners, this choice of venue further reinforced the production of craftworks that looked like art, and where the makers addressed 'art' concerns - most successfully also within 'crafts' concerns.

The pursuit of art ideals posed a dilemma for those craftspeople who wanted to be identified as artists. Developments in art in the 1970s could not be easily adopted by craftspeople. For many craftspeople, the adoption of a 'form' of art was not 'informed' by the concerns that had generated it. While some art-craft works were clearly successful, the pursuit of art ideals also provoked an even greater production of art-craft objects made by craftspeople who were neither designers nor artists, as those terms were currently understood by either field at the time. Their works had the appearance of art (or design) without the conceptual underpinning that made them credible to the art world. However, for many craftspeople - and their supporters - if the work was 'non-functional', 'social comment' or 'a personal expression', they considered it must therefore *be* art.

For example, many craftspeople used, at first, forms and ideas in which, by the early 1970s, visual artists were becoming increasingly disinterested. They made 'sculpture' on pedestals, and free-form organic 'non-functional' objects displaying technical virtuosity in skill in, for example, glass, wood, textiles,

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[390]Cedar Prest 'Glass and its Development' *Craft Australia* Spring 3 1979 16. Prest was a practising stained glass artist, and was later to be chair of the Crafts Board.

metal and clay that were unconvincing to visual artists and their audiences in both their ideas and forms.

A number of people successfully made connections between their practice and a strongly-held political position. And within the art world some visual artists embraced the idea of the crafts-as-art as part of a political statement. Feminist artists, for example, selectively employed crafts techniques in their own work. But in seeing 'social comment' simply as a path to 'art', many more craftspeople who had had a superficial role in the developing political position, or who could not successfully combine political ideas with form, made works that were unconvincing as either art or the area in which they were working.

Others tried to follow conceptual directions. But this form of art was not sympathetic to crafts practice. Conceptual art, which valued the artist's intent or idea rather than the making of objects, was not only an important reassessment of the visual arts. It also confirmed art's denial of issues that were central to the crafts: interest in materials, care and attention to process, fine finish and technical achievement. Lack of skill, naïvety, and irreverence for materials and processes were, during the 1970s, associated with expressive emotional sincerity in the artist, and intellectual rather than formal content in their work. Conversely, concern for materials and processes was seen as proof that originality and ideas were lacking: sometimes a work remained a conceptual idea only.

Many craftspeople at this time were clearly liberated by the challenges to function and utility offered by the ideals of the fine arts, and without doubt, worked successfully across, for example, both the crafts and sculpture. The most convincing new works were those that responded to the challenges of contemporary thinking in art and design, but drew also on the perceptions and understandings of the materials, processes and functions of the crafts traditions from which they came.

But while there were certainly many successful excursions into the challenges provided by an orientation towards the visual arts and its ideals, there were hundreds that failed through a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of what contemporary art ideals had been in the first place.

Response from the art world

It appears, from the little published critical material in the Australian craft world of the time, that few in the craft world noticed or accepted that many of the objects that were made as 'art-craft' were unacceptable as art, as it was understood at that time.

Despite the inclusion of crafts courses in art schools, and despite institutional support that ran parallel to the visual arts in the programs of bodies like the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, both the mainstream art world and the

alternative art world of the 1970s chose to largely ignore the crafts movement's efforts towards being accepted as art. The crafts were seen by artists and their historians to be unrelated to prevailing art values of ideas and intellect, and to have instead, historical associations with trade, domesticity and therapy and continuing obsessions with artisanship, skill, materials and technologies that were, at that time, unacceptable as art.

In 1980 art critic John Bentley Mays pointed out from the United States:

> The pioneers of Modernism were...moved by skepticism and science, not by old-fashioned pieties...Hands cannot contemplate; and the creation of works for disinterested, hands-off contemplation has traditionally been a central concern of all Modern art production...Modern art itself, in all its variety, is proof that the historically anti-hand, anti-craft strategy continues to be radical and greatly rewarding.[391]

In the same year metalsmith and writer Bruce Metcalf also observed of the crafts, even in the United States, so close to the source of most new art directions, 'a current "five-year-lag" syndrome...where a current idiom will show up in the crafts about five years after it appears in painting and sculpture.' While there had always been borrowings across disciplines, he pointed out that '...what irks critics today is the obviousness of the influence and the tardiness in picking up the style'.[392]

In dismissing 'art-craft', visual artists tended, by association, to dismiss every kind of crafts practice as non-art. It is also clear, however, that many visual artists valued craft works that remained somehow true to their functional, symbolic and technological origins and still hold them in their personal collections.

But although the craft world had in many cases denied 'traditions' in order to enter the art world, the art world seemed more than happy to similarly deny them entry - on any level, if their record of historical documentation can be taken as a measure. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the crafts as contemporary craftspeople practiced them, were not included in art books, in mainstream art exhibitions or in university art history courses.[393]

One might expect that, given the size and dynamic of the crafts movement, some aspect of crafts practice would perhaps have been shared by Australian visual artists of the time who were seeking alternatives in their work. However, even in *Anything Goes*, Paul Taylor's extensive documentation of the alternative art practices in Australia in the 1970s, the considerable contemporary presence of the crafts movement and its ideals and practices was not acknowledged in any way.[394] By 1982, when John McPhee provided a survey of current crafts activity for inclusion in Leon Paroissien's *Australian*

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[391]John Bentley Mays 'Comment' *American Craft* 45/5 Oct/Nov 1985 38
[392]Bruce Metcalf 'Crafts: Second Class Citizens?' *Metalsmith* 1/1 1980 16
[393]Refer Thesis Chapter 1
[394]Paul Taylor, *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980* (1984)

Art Review 2, he suggested that this review was the first of its kind in an art journal.[395] Even then however, the illustrations he used did not show contemporary crafts at all: they depicted 'folk crafts' and paintings, international ceramic design of the early 20th century and an installation of Australian art (and crafts) of the 1930s.

Conclusion

Craftspeople in the 1970s reflected the spirit of the time in the kind of work they made, and so also did the various educational, funding and co-ordinating institutions reflect in their programs, by and large, all the desires of the crafts movement, which ever direction they took. The resources were available for both education and community initiatives, which in turn supported the marketplace. There was increased contact for craftspeople throughout Australia and other parts of the world: travel, visitors, exhibitions, collections, workshop establishment, new courses, traineeships and publications challenged and extended both craftspeople and their institutions.

In identifying as the main issue of concern the lack of recognition of craftspeople as serious professionals - whether making functional works or 'art-craft' works - the movement's efforts to both develop its professional base and at the same time provide access to the wider community, corresponded with institutional ideals of the time.

But while all directions in the crafts were practised (studio crafts, design for industry and art-craft), craftspeople nonetheless placed extra value on 'art-craft' works and exhibitions at art venues. The institutions of the art world - the art schools, the galleries and the art world publications - provided the best framework at that time for validation and status.

Some craftspeople were successful in their aspirations; but many more failed.

Moreover, despite the wide public profile and institutional support of the crafts movement, those writing art and cultural histories of this time did not include this movement in their narratives or analysis: the hierarchies of the art world effectively excluded it from their mainstream accounts.

The crafts movement's need to review the characteristics of crafts practice and address its ideals and values in relation to its own histories, as well as to art and design, will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[395]Leon Paroissien (ed) *Australian Art Review 2* (1982). This publication also included a review of the exhibition International Directions in Glass, and the Women in Arts Festival in which some craftspeople had been involved.

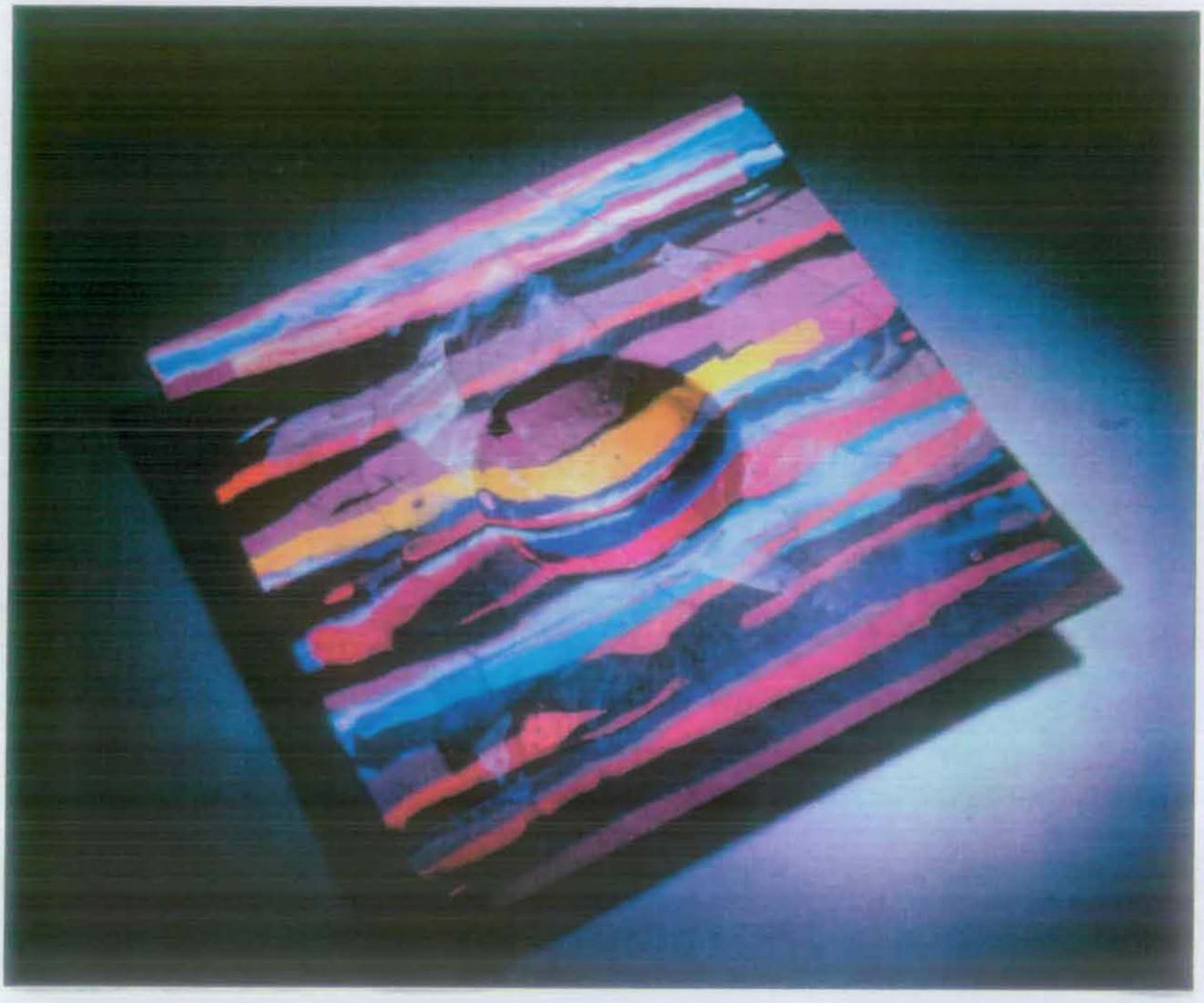

Plate 15: Klaus Moje
(see page 182) Bowl-form, fused mosaic glass, made in Canberra in 1991. (7 x 44.5 x 55cm)

Klaus Moje (b.1936) is one of the most influential glass practitioners in Australia. This is not only because of his exemplary personal work and 10 years of teaching, but because of the opportunities he has opened up around the world, especially in the United States, for others. Trained as a glass cutter in the family business in Germany in the 1950s, he made his first kiln-formed mosaic works, based on a very ancient process, in 1975. An association with the Bullseye Glass company in the United States in the 1980s has been fruitful for both: ideas can now be resolved through the materials and technologies developed to carry them out. This co-incided with his arrival in Australia in 1982 and a confrontation with the colours and light in a different environment.

When Moje first went to the United States: 'There were a lot of slogans like "Blow glass for peace." People would say, "We don't need technique, we push our breath into the glass and we have a piece of art." ...So technique and skill was a fourletter word...'. His work has often been linked visually to painters like Stella and Pollock, but he says: 'Those comparisons have always been made without my ever intending them in my work...One of the possibilities of glass, as opposed to paint, is that it offers transparency...My principal concern is working with colour and achieving something out of it.'
Klaus Moje, in Anne Brennan 'Interview: Klaus Moje' *Glass* 68 Fall 1997

Chapter 5:
Finding a new voice: questioning art ideals, 1980s and 1990s

This chapter will discuss some of the factors, in a different social and political climate, that prompted a number of crafts practitioners and writers to begin to question their dependence on the values and structures of the art world. It will consider the moves to revalue traditional ideals and affiliations through the observations of contemporary cultural theory, through new interpretations of an artist's role, and through the changes in priorities of education, funding and the marketplace. It will also document some of the ways practitioners made changes to the ways in which they worked in response to a broader view of how their work might be considered and valued.

Introduction

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, craftspeople continued to pursue art ideals; the emphasis on making 'craft-as-art' was reinforced by visitors, by overseas exhibitions in most media,[396] by collectors, and by the courses that developed in art schools, now in universities.

In this work, craftspeople used the medium in which they worked as a means for making personal statements: sometimes the works denied the history of their practice, and sometimes this history was used as part of the meaning of the work.[397] The prevailing interest in art theory was now to provoke in this area of practice, at its best, reflective work that addressed the histories and significance of the practical and symbolic functions of the objects that were made.

However, not all the work was considered successful, let alone successful as 'art', and questions were increasingly asked about the validity of some of the work produced. British writer Peter Fuller, a relentless critic of 'art-craft', damned both the influential British ceramic exhibition, Image and Idea, in 1980, and also the British textile exhibition, Fibre and Form, selected by Michael Brennand-Wood to travel to Australia in 1982. Here Fuller blamed the influence of recent art:

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[396]Art-oriented exhibitions included Image and Idea (British ceramics, 1980), International Directions in Glass Art (1982) and Fabric and Form (British textile art, 1982).

[397]See for example, the ways in which 'crafts' media addressed themselves to sculpture, in exhibitions such as Sculptors as Craftsmen, associated with the second Sculpture Triennial in Melbourne in 1984-85; Figurative Ceramics, Vessel as Metaphor and Common Ground: Sculptural Works in Clay and Mixed Media - all associated with the fifth Potters Conference in Sydney in 1988; and the controversial Terra Incognita in Perth in 1989 where heated exchanges about the identity and purpose of the work took place in arts journals between writers such as David Bromfield (*CraftWest*) and Anne Brennan (*Broadsheet*) in 1989.

> As we all know, the officially sponsored salon avant-garde in painting and sculpture of the last quarter century hurled itself headlong into a headlong "questioning of the media" which involved the suppression of the imaginative faculties; the erosion of basic skills and knowledge; a confusion of boundaries of the arts and their particular expressive possibilities; a denigration of aesthetic judgement; a ruthless determination to dissolve painting and sculpture into *anything* that is neither painting, nor sculpture; an indifference to tradition, material quality, or realised value; and a mindlessly destructive elevation of "innovation" as the sole criterion of worth...and all Brennand-Wood is doing is applying it...to textiles.[398]

Michael Brennand-Wood had claimed that the study of painting and sculpture had changed the terms of reference within which contemporary textiles are produced, and hoped that this would lead to 'a little more emphasis on imagination and originality as opposed to just technique...'. Fabric and Form, he said:

> ...was not meant to be a neat exercise containing familiar work. It was meant to take risks and provoke.'[399] Fuller called for the exhibition to be recalled and dismantled, saying 'Those of us who have been involved in the Fine Arts *know* what will happen next...Within a few months, we can confidently expect Minimal Textiles - exhibitions of mounds of raw wool and silk worms; Conceptual Textiles, consisting of photographs and documentation of the way the warp would have interacted with the weft if any weaving were to take place which, of course, it won't; and Video Textiles, say wall-hangings made from inter-meshed lengths of videotape which, if they could be viewed, would reveal images of an erstwhile weaver picking his nose because now he has nothing better to do...[400]

Other criticisms have been noted in Chapter 1: for example, in discussing the touring exhibition American Figurative Ceramics in 1990, Anne Brennan pointed out that:

> ...a lot of its rhetoric stems from subversive strategies which have subsequently become conventions. Some artists appear not to have been able to make the leap from the burning deck in time, and as a result, their work suffers something of a credibility gap.[401]

Jenny Zimmer similarly observed of textile works that:

> ...freedom from the loom and tapestry tradition does not necessarily pre-suppose greater freedom to choose an aesthetic over a utilitarian mode...it can and has produced senseless woven monsters...the medium must be pushed to

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[398]Peter Fuller 'Fabric and Form' review *Crafts* 59 Nov/Dec 1982 43-44

[399]Michael Brennand-Wood, response to Peter Fuller's review of 'Fabric and Form' *Crafts* 59 Nov/Dec 1982 44-45

[400]Peter Fuller op cit (1982)

[401]Anne Brennan *Broadsheet* 19 1 March 1990 12, 13; referring to Matthew Kangas, catalogue essay and exhibition 'American Figurative Ceramics' in *Perth International Craft Triennial* Art Gallery of Western Australia 12

> the limits of contemporary expression and fully involve itself with contemporary conceptual and visual problems.[402]

British writer Peter Dormer observed of the art-craft object that 'a combination of postmodernist excess and ambition to be seen as an artist has tempted many a contemporary craftsperson into some highly skilled work of exaggerated design, size and complexity and hugely inflated prices.'[403]And in the United States, pointing out that she expected a lot from art, and suggesting that in her opinion only a microscopic, almost invisible group working in studio glass, were making it, curator Susanne Frantz said, 'The most glaring ways this situation manifests itself is in the mistaking of decorative objects for art.' Her point was that 'everyone working in studio glass has to face [the fact] that they are makers of luxury goods which can only be purchased by people with disposable income'.[404]

At the 8th National Ceramic Conference in Canberra in 1996, John Teschendorf discussed the 'bane of his life': the term 'ceramic sculpture', and cited Edward Lebow in the journal *American Ceramics*, as sharing his view:

> Just the nomenclature [of ceramic sculpture] is unfortunate...that term has been used to isolate all the work within that category for market purposes. Those purposes are to confer the status of art upon a whole body of generally mediocre works. If you put much of what passes as ceramic sculpture alongside work in other media, it would be seen as trite doodads for people who have a lot of time on their hands and for people who have an awful lot of money and very little taste.'

This was not to say, Teschendorf continued:

> ...that great sculpture cannot be made in clay, and this will be done from time to time from those working from a craft base. There is, however, a tendency in Australia and elsewhere to confuse sculptural intent with the figurative tradition of the decorative arts...May I suggest that there is an urgent need to put our house in order...by establishing the primacy of language to recognise that sculpture will be sculpture regardless of its material or methodology.[405]

Why were such informed and influential people expressing such concerns? Why were they now so distinctly critical of a prevailing aspiration?

Their criticisms appeared to be made partly in accord with a changing, critical cultural and political climate. But they were also a reflection of a new

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[402]Jenny Zimmer in *Wool and Beyond First Australian Fibre Conference* report 1981 31

[403]Peter Dormer 'The ideal world of Vermeer's little lacemaker' in John Thackara *Design after Modernism* (1988) 142

[404]Susanne Frantz, 'Internationalism in Glass: too much common ground', *Ausglass* magazine, post-conference edition 1991 73-74

[405]John Teschendorf 'Is there a Future for Clay' conference paper, 8th National Ceramics Conference, Canberra, 1996

critical context for the arts provided by different education and market opportunities and realities; a context that served to reinforce a more positive role for crafts practice as a contemporary development from a wider range of traditions - that also included an informed pursuit of art ideals.

A changing society

By the beginning of the 1980s it was clear that craftspeople (and, in fact, artists across all artforms) were working in a different social and political climate: one that affected their own aspirations as well as the market or audience they were addressing. There was a marked shift in the values and expectations of the Western world from idealism to pragmatism, and from reform to conservatism, in a definite political and ideological move to the right.

In trying to deal with such issues as unemployment, inflation, trade deficits and an ageing population, governments argued that exports must be increased and markets expanded. Increasingly, they viewed accountability in both the arts and the sciences as related less to personal and social development, the experimental, the marginal or for research (which typified the 1970s), than to vocational achievements, export products and Australian corporate identity and business success overseas.

Pressure was put on research and educational institutions to work towards tangible economic products for export. Both the arts and science communities argued that this was a short-term goal, and that what was equally, if not more, important was to address wider social, ecological and cultural issues first. Increased numbers of arts graduates in a small competitive marketplace caused some practitioners to seek alternative methods of production and new markets, and an increased flexibility within the scope of their own professional employment.

Public galleries and museums were encouraged to cater more for public education, enjoyment and entertainment, presenting their collections in wider social and cultural contexts. They sought corporate sponsorship for their programs in order to do this - often, according to their critics, at the expense of scholarship and research. The 1988 Bicentennial celebrations brought to the surface many questions about who Australians thought they were, what they thought they were doing, and where they believed they should be going. People began to recognise something called 'fragmented radicalism', as there seemed to be no common radical cause any more.[406]

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[406]In 1986, for example, Greg Sheridan pointed out that 'all of the workable parts of the left's agenda have been carried through in Western democratic societies...Single-issue groups of all types are immensely helpful to the left in gaining recruits and building up an adversary culture, a culture of opposition to the way society runs. But these groups also have a life of their own.' Greg Sheridan 'The New Left: Is there Life After Socialism?' *Weekend Australian* 5-6 April 1986

There were many related changes in the art world. Rather than dismissing the art market, as visual artists had tried to do in the 1970s, Australian involvement in the international market flourished. The art market also celebrated a skill-based 'return to painting' - a return that now included those that were decorative, narrative and figurative, all approaches that had been subsumed in the conceptual and minimal work of the 1970s.[407] In spite of social and cultural changes, values were placed on traditional practices in all art forms, and critics now consistently wrote in positive terms about the 'craft' of painting, film-making and writing novels.

At the same time, interest in semiotic and cultural theory also provoked visual art works that were intellectual and literary rather than visual (or well-crafted) in their primary intent. Eventually these works attracted some criticism for their dependence on literary rather than visual languages. Meanwhile, from the early 1980s Australian Aboriginal art became accepted by the international art world, partly, no doubt, because it became more accessible on Western art media like canvas and paper, but also because the art world at that time was interested in the abstract symbolic and semiotic codes that it appeared to represent.[408]

In the early 1980s there were many projects employing artists in the community, often now as teams with designers and landscape architects for inner city street-scaping, while commissions for public art projects also increased in number throughout the decade. People willingly accepted and sought out the designer-label clothing and postmodern furniture of the time, while at the same time seeking 'spiritual' alternatives in their personal lives.

Craftspeople, it seemed, could work successfully in a number of different contexts. Art ideals might not be the only ones to consider, but when they were considered, they needed to be clearly understood.

Changing perceptions: art and cultural theory

By the beginning of the 1980s artists in all fields became increasingly involved in theoretical discussions about their work. For craftspeople, these ideas provided rationales for being less dependent on validation of the crafts through art.

The arts provided just one forum for philosophical questioning on a much wider social and political scale, which had started much earlier in a number of different ways. Historians and social commentators in Australia found arguments to show that they believed many existing written histories included biases that might be identified as partisan, class-based, racist,

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[407]See for example, Leon Paroissien's *Australian Art Review* 2 (1983)

[408] See for example a review of the Australian exhibition in Paris, 'From Another Continent: the Dream is Real', by Joan Davila in *Art Network* 13 Spring 1984 50

nationalist, colonialist-imperialist and sexist. They set out to explain and redress previously ignored ideologies and histories.

Modernism, as it advocated the autonomy of the artist and the ideal of an autonomous aesthetic in art, came to be seen as a tool of reaction where it refused to acknowledge the historical and social context of art production, or the notion that its 'truths' were not free of culturally constructed value. It was pointed out that the art world or art institutions (in the form of art schools, galleries, museums, investors, publications, governments and the general public), had reinforced what was essentially an élitist practice focused on a selective, usually male, mainstream. As historian Penny Sparke said of the parallel world of design, in 1987, 'The designed artefact is on its simplest level...a form of communication and what it conveys depends on the framework within which it functions.'[409]

The philosophy and aesthetic of Postmodernism, associated with these changes in thought in the 1980s, was difficult to define. In one way it was simply an acknowledgement of the period after Modernism (although Modernism persisted), and a rejection of reductivist, late modernist, ideals. But it also became more commonly identified with a recognisable stylistic change. Postmodernism adopted what late Modernism had rejected in the form of figurative, decorative and ornamental, mythological, cross-cultural and historical references. 'At an extreme,' said Sandy Nairne in 1987:

> ...the post-modern world is seen as totally commodified; culture is flattened out, with little remaining difference between "high" and "low" culture, little argument between fine art and kitsch, or between the "avant-garde" and the academic. The world is reduced to a series of simulacra: there is a new depthlessness, appearance is everything. Nothing is original or authentic because the world is experienced second-hand. There is a new sense of nostalgia as we lose a secure sense of our place in history; all culture becomes a parody of past forms.[410]

For many, Postmodernism was a superficial style, instantly recognisable, particularly in architecture and design, where 'quoting' of historical form and decoration, central to the new thinking, was commonly practised.[411] In art, design, literature, and video and film-making, it 'plundered' high art, popular culture, the mass media and kitsch, mixing them together as 'pastiche'. It was exciting, irreverent and popular.

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[409]Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987) 8

[410]Sandy Nairne *The State of the Art, Ideas and Images in the '80s* (1987) 22. See also the writings on simulacra by Jean Baudrillard.

[411]One can not help but observe that, 100 years before, the design reformers in England had campaigned strongly to counter what they saw at that time as the excesses of decoration and eclectic reference to past traditions, in a time of 'stylistic anarchy' where manufactured objects 'displayed a general enthusiasm for ornament for ornament's sake and an overall neglect for any fixed principle of design, other than those motivated by the marketplace.' See Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987) 63 discussing the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.

But Postmodernism was not welcomed by everyone. In a 1984 revision of his controversial 1972 publication *Design For the Real World*, Victor Papanek complained that:

> ...the cancerous growth of the creative individual expressing himself egotistically at the expense of the spectator and/or consumer has spread from the arts, overrun most of the crafts, and finally reached into design...A whole elitist nostalgia craze has elevated some of the most uncomfortable seating arrangements yet devised by man into trendy and expensive status symbols that lie halfway between refined torture-racks and "art objects".

Papanek argued that what may have been a 'disengaged surrealist act' fifty years before was being revived in 1983 as 'kitschy nostalgia'.[412]

Postmodern stylistic developments were accompanied by new ways of considering both how meanings are made and how they are valued. These 'cultural theories' came from a number of different sources. In particular, over some decades a body of literature had developed in France around the studies of semiotics and structuralism (from linguistic, psychoanalytic and anthropological sources), which explored the ways in which meanings are constructed through 'signs' and perceptions of those signs.[413] Archaeology provided related models through studies of the objects of material culture of different societies; psychology and psychoanalysis contributed to explaining in part how it is that people are motivated to do certain things, including their desire for creative or symbolic expression;[414]and socialist thought continued to advocate the democratic expression of this need.[415]

In particular, from the 1970s sociological methodology had been used to identify the frameworks within which the arts are produced, understood and valued, and how arts hierarchies are constructed.[416] Arguments were mounted for dismantling these hierarchies: the women's movement, for example, had showed how socially constructed patriarchal attitudes and language had affected perceptions of value,[417] and in places like Australia, with its increasingly multicultural population, it was realised that measures of cultural significance had been clearly Eurocentric in their focus.

These ideas came to Australia through publications and magazines from the various centres of study, through Australian travel and study overseas,

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[412]Victor Papanek *Design for the Real World* Thames and Hudson London (1972) revised 1984 41

[413]For example, by Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault

[414]For example, Arthur Koestler *The Act of Creation* (1966)

[415]The community arts movement of the 1970s in Australia was an attempt to encourage (and revive) creative expression amongst workers, especially in the trade unions.

[416]See for example, Roland Barthes for semiotics; Raymond Williams for studies on cultural and society; Arnold Hauser, Janet Wolff, Howard Becker, Peter Dormer, Penny Sparke for a sociological position; Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Isabelle Anscombe for feminist views.

[417]See discussion on the women's art movement in Chapter 3.

through visitors, and through migrant lecturers who were appointed to teach in universities and art schools. What had been mainly literary and philosophical ideas were largely aired in the art media first. Conservative courses in university literature, philosophy, and history departments in Australia caused those interested in new ideas to seek forums for discussion elsewhere. Some found them through film studies courses and studies of popular culture, while some university fine arts history departments, and programs in media studies and communications introduced a cultural theory component into their courses.[418] In the early 1980s a number of small visual arts and cultural theory magazines appeared and proved to be appropriate vehicles for the discussions that were taking place.[419]

Theoretical issues were introduced, unevenly at first, into Australian art institutions. One response was that terminology changed as it was now realised that some words carried with them perceptions that were being called into question. Cultural or art theory was now discussed as part of art history, and consideration of work often took the form of 'discourse' rather than 'review' and 'critique' rather than 'criticism'. In trying to find less value-laden words (or to redefine values), the term 'art practice' began to be used, rather than 'art'; and the terms 'art practitioner' or 'artworker' instead of 'visual' or 'fine' artist. 'Artist' was increasingly used as a neutral term that could be applied to any practitioner in any art form. What was produced, whether painting, pot, item of jewellery or video, was more frequently simply called an 'artwork', or 'a work'. This move sometimes subsumed the crafts (and other art forms) into 'art' by 'blurring boundaries', but in contradiction, it also reflected an attempt to be more inclusive of a range of specific practices.

'Craftspeople' eventually replaced 'craftsmen', and the term 'craft' itself often seemed to have either too wide or too narrow a meaning. Apart from the increasing use of specialist terms, such as jeweller, painter and weaver, other specific combinations, such as 'glassworker', 'ceramic artist' or 'textile designer' became more common, demonstrating more clearly where practitioners now placed themselves ideologically. The term 'designer-maker' found increasing favour among those with a commitment to designing for production and some started to again call themselves 'decorative artists'.

The 'new' cultural theory was of quite some importance to the crafts movement. This was not so that craftspeople would direct their efforts towards theory (and therefore become more acceptable to the art world), but

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[418] Ross Gibson, unpublished lecture discussing the introduction of new ideas through visual arts publications, to postgraduate students, Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart 1985. Gibson had been editor of the arts journal *On the Beach.*

[419] See list of publications, including *Art Network, On the Beach, Art&Text* and others, in Margriet Bonnin *Visual Arts/Crafts Board Publications Review* (1988)

because it provided a framework for discussing their specific positions, and arguing for separate, but equally important, acknowledgement of value.

Having 'emerged' from artisan trades, studio crafts practitioners spent decades caught between industrial and interior design and the fine arts.[420] They had had little alternative but to emulate the art world as a system because it provided the most successful mechanism for the validation of their status as professional people. As sociologist Janet Wolff pointed out:

> ...the conditions in which craft aspires to be art are essentially social...Craft: "becomes" art when it develops an equivalent system of shows, sales, criticism, academic recognition and educational support. This has nothing to do with the nature of the product, which can remain entirely unchanged. The debate is centrally one about social, organisational setting.[421]

Now craftspeople could place themselves in an equally valid, but different, position. It could now be argued that the histories and practices of working in, for example, glass, metal, ceramics and textiles were just as important and valid as a history of painting; that vessels had as long a social, ritual and ceremonial function as sculpture; and equally, that stained glass windows and textiles had as long a cultural function as painting and printmaking. Thus, rather than arguing for the crafts to 'be' art, a number of critics argued that the crafts represented a series of histories and values that were distinct from, but not of lesser value than, art - and that one of those histories was the relationship of the crafts to art.

This realisation, or acceptance, not only 'allowed' the acknowledgement of specialist crafts histories in discussing the field, but also provided craftspeople with the confidence to draw on these histories metaphorically as well as technically in the production of their work. They did not have to 'deny' either technological or symbolic crafts references, in order to make significant works (whether or not they were also called 'art'). For example, in her work *Pineforest Quilt – Applied, Used, Discarded,* tapestry weaver Valerie Kirk brings together a collection of traditions:

> The image in the tapestry...has been developed from drawings of the pineforest plantations and areas of native vegetation around Canberra...Replacing the bush with development continues as the nation's capital grows. The overall format is that of a quilt, playing on the idea of the quilt/forest as a covering and looking at women in the domestic environment reshaping fabrics to provide a cover.[422]

Kirk was drawing firstly on memories of a quilt of Scottish tweed and plaid suiting samples made within her own family in the Selkirk area in Scotland. However, integrated into her drawings of pineforests around Canberra, she

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[420]See, for example, Sylvia Kleinert 'The Historical Context' *Ausglass* postconference edition 1 1991

[421]Janet Wolff 'Social Context' *Crafts* Sept/Oct 1988 16

[422]Valerie Kirk, artist's statement 1994

has placed motifs from two early Australian quilts: The *Medallion Quilt* of about 1895 and a 'Wagga' quilt made from woollen suiting samples in about 1930.[423] *(see Plate 5: before page 33)*

Furthermore, it could now be pointed out that some visual artists who, from the 1970s, had 'adopted' the crafts in their artworks, in the context of the art world, had practised another form of appropriation. They had revalued the crafts, especially women's crafts, by, in fact, turning them into something else - by politicising them, when in most cases the objects they were revaluing were not political in their original intent.

Feminist critics and historians were among those who traced this complex history. Norma Broude, for example, identified in 1980 that 'as art in the twentieth century became increasingly abstract', artists and critics had struggled:

> ...to create a clear distinction between the abstract and the "merely" decorative. In order to define and maintain the position of abstract art as "high" art, its supporters and apologists have been obliged to literally fight off the taint of association with so-called low art, variously defined as the decorative and often domestic handicraft productions of commercial artists, women, peasants and savages'.[424]

Broude pointed out that male artists like Henri Matisse borrowed from the decorative arts in their work, but 'without ever really raising them from their lowly status, and without ever allowing his stature to be diminished because of them' - even though art historians sought in various ways to 'excuse' these connections.

She suggested that an artist like Miriam Shapiro in the 1970s, was therefore making a conscious effort to re-establish her connections with older and more authentic traditions of Modernism (with roots both in Symbolism and the Arts and Crafts movement) and that it was not helpful to consider her, like many other (male) artists of the 1970s, as merely 'anti-Minimalist' in her style and intent. She criticised writers who 'packaged together' the new 'decorative' artists, and who engaged us again in the dated exercise of 'attempting to elevate the "decorative" to the "abstract" by endowing it with arcane and self-referential meanings. 'By doing so', she claimed, 'of course, it continues to deny to the decorative, the right to exist as art on its own terms.'[425]

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[423] The *Medallion Quilt* was made by Mrs 'Grannie' Brown, from Bowning in NSW about 1895. The 'Wagga' quilt was made from woollen suiting samples by Caroline West, in Trundle, NSW in about 1930. Both tin the collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

[424] Norma Broude 'Miriam Shapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art' *Arts Magazine* February 1980, cited in Norma Broude *Feminsim and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) 320

[425] Norma Broude ibid 326-7

However, Broude also acknowledged that in working within decorative and crafts traditions, and in politicising these traditions to reinstate them in value within the art world, Shapiro had also 'inadvertently' separated her works from the traditions themselves. While she '*reveals* them - perhaps fully for the first time - as objects of aesthetic value and expressive significance...she has inadvertently and unavoidably separated her works from that tradition, allying them to some extent with the modernist mainstream.' Feminist art, Broude claimed, by virtue of its human, social and political significance, 'can never be "merely decorative."' But it was the content of this kind of work 'that may some day secure for other artists the right to be "merely decorative", and to produce a "high art" that is free to eschew significance other than the "merely" visual'.[426]

By the 1990s one of the visual artists who could be considered to be highly successful in making connections between art ideals and craft skills was artist Fiona Hall. Her well-researched, powerfully subjective and yet political works incorporated at various times metalworking, crochet, glass engraving and ceramic forming that she carried out herself, and that reflected a strong understanding of skills, materials and their meanings.

In exposing the social construction of cultural hierarchies and hegemonies,[427] the theories of the 1980s therefore provided crafts practitioners with a rationale for their own historical and theoretical validity, independent from, although often overlapping, those of design and the fine arts.

There were words of warning however. In accommodating contemporary theory, the crafts had celebrated, along with other artforms, the idea of 'crossing borders' and 'breaking down barriers' that had served to distinguish hierarchies in the arts. But Jenny Zimmer pointed out in 1990 that in pursuing this course, the crafts were 'in danger of being homogenised within an all-encompassing definition of art.' She argued that:

> ...if the definition of art were genuinely extended to cover the legitimate concerns of the crafts there would be a good case for abandoning the distinction. But contemporary theory simply blurs it. Under these circumstances the crafts are better served by maintaining and refining the distinction to highlight their particular qualities.[428]

But even the pursuit of some of the 'particular qualities' of the crafts, like continuing links with traditions, could now remain problematic. 'The great value we put on individualism means a loss of belief in what used to be called the common weal,' said Peter Timms:

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[426]Norma Broude ibid 322, 328

[427]These theories also provided a similar framework of validity for other previously marginal groups, such as those separated from the mainstream by race, class or gender, and for those studying other cultural histories such as music, theatre, sport and games.

[428]Jenny Zimmer 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater' *The Sydney Review* October 1990 10-11

> It should hardly be surprising, then, that when artists and craftspeople express an interest in revitalising connections with the past, they tend to use cultural traditions indiscriminately as a kind of database in the service of narcissism. How often do we hear of artists and craftspeople drawing on some tradition (one which is perceived to be 'their own' or one that they have just picked up along the way) to explore the self? This way of using traditions to restore individual identity is problematic because it assumes that the crossover from the communal to the personal can be achieved without doing violence to the social fabric, and that individual needs and desires somehow automatically serve as a microcosm or distillation of communal interests'.

However, rather than argue against calling on tradition and heritage to validate a particular approach to one's work, he suggested instead that it was necessary to offer a realistic appraisal of what is possible: 'What can, perhaps, be achieved is some degree of personal understanding which might lead to others discovering something about themselves in turn. What decisively cannot be achieved is a revival of those traditions.'[429]

The 1980s provided new opportunities for such appraisals through infrastructural changes in education, funding and the marketplace, and through new attitudes about the identity of the crafts.

Changing identity: the artist as worker

New circumstances

The confidence with which craftspeople could now seek to redefine their practice on their own terms was made more possible through the changing perceptions in the art world about the nature of art practice itself. Art practitioners in all fields started to realise that the other activities in which they were engaged, like teaching, working with the community, giving a lecture or demonstration, sitting on a board or committee, researching and writing, presenting exhibitions, or carrying out some administrative work, were also complementary to their practice and contributed to their professional lives, like any other professional practice.

As the 1980s progressed, craftspeople were part of new moves to identify artists as part of the workforce, and they formed new liaisons with other art industry groups. This occurred in the face of a persistent attitude in the art world that these related professional activities were detrimental to art-making and demonstrated a lack of commitment to it. Alison Fraser, for example, involved in commissioning artists for public art projects in Melbourne, suggested that a basic and continuing education was necessary, one that would allow artists to operate in an informed way about the legal, ethical and organisational issues that were bound to arise. 'Much greater attention has to be paid by educational institutions, by funding authorities and by artists

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[429]Peter Timms 'The Use and Abuse of Traditons' in Jenny Zimmer (ed) *Contemporary Craft Review*, Craft Victoria, 1996 15 -18

themselves', she said, 'to professionalism in operation as well as professionalism in content.'[430]

The complexity, diversity and changing nature of attitudes to crafts practice were surveyed and analysed by Susan McHattie for the Crafts Council of New South Wales in 1988. Responses from fifty-six professional practitioners reflected some 'clear threads' within this diversity. These were summarised in order of priority as: *Pleasure* (gratification, enjoyment, preference, choice, pleasure); *Power* (potency, ability, control, autonomy, power), and *Reward* (acknowledgement, fame, fortune, prestige, reward). The 'liberal individualism' evident in the responses, she observed:

> ...indicates that few of the participants seek a political framework in understanding and constructing a role and position. The desire for power and autonomy is located within the personal, together with notions of talent, self-expression and work.'[431]

In noting the significant shift in the crafts movement from amateurism to professionalism, McHattie suggested that conducting practice on a professional level required a shift from 'self-indulgent individualism' towards an understanding of and contribution to a wider social context.

The main measure of professional achievement had been the acquisition of works into state and private collections through the dealer gallery system, but exhibitions did not always lead to sales and, until now, artists had almost always subsidised their work through other employment, often teaching. For craftspeople, working in a generally lower price-range, this was a comparatively narrow marketplace; they also subsidised their income through teaching or some other employment, or more often developed production lines that were also sold through galleries and shops. However, as the 1980s progressed, teaching in art schools was losing ground for all, as a work option. The combination of reduction in staff numbers, particularly of part-time staff, and the increasing numbers of trained practitioners wanting work meant there was not enough of this employment to go round. As a further complication, this situation fuelled distrust between 'real', or full-time, practitioners and those who subsidised their practice through what was seen as highly paid teaching, engendering a new discussion on the nature of

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[430]Alison Fraser 'Darwinism and the Arts, Community Arts and Natural Selection' *Artlink* June/July 86

vol 6 nos 2, 3. Fraser noted three familiar statements from artists seeking employment or moving into new employment areas: '1: I'm an artist. I want to get on with my work. I'm wasting time messing about with forms, permits and an endless round of meetings. 2: I'm an artist. What I want to say is in my work. I'm not interested in having to sell myself to anyone. 3: I'm an artist. Everything hinges on that. If I spend a lot of my time away from my arts practice...I'll lose ground, I'll lose direction. I won't be taken seriously.'

[431]Susan McHattie *Pleasure, Power and Reward, A Survey of the Practice of 56 Craftspeople* (1988) 177

professionalism. Subsidised practitioners more often than not made 'art-craft' items, because they were not so dependent on sales.

As the political and social climate changed, less value was placed by governments on 'unproductive' activities - activities for cultural rather than direct economic benefit. Education, welfare, research and the arts had to be 'accountable' in measurable terms. By 1996, for example, the taxation department started to tighten up its conditions for artists, and to require that their practices be profitable as businesses, if they were to attract taxation deductions. One reported interview even reflected a view that artists might carry out market research into painting styles that had a high market value.[432] Both government and the broad general public tended to consider the arts in traditional (usually European) terms, and the 1980s saw great controversies as marginal or experimental groups criticised what they saw as the disproportionate funding going to, for example, the 'flagship' arts companies, especially performing arts companies.[433]

Art world responses

The art world responded by realising that it was itself an industry, and to its surprise a large one: well-educated, heavily subsidised by its own participants, labour-intensive, a high contributor to the gross national product, and, needless to say, not recognised as such.

The art workforce was no longer largely self-trained or 'cringing culturally' in its attitude. It included practising tertiary-trained, often well-travelled, practitioners, many widely experienced in a range of personal, political, community and public practices, and many who had been involved in the administration, management and development of arts programs. In 1989, drawing on figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australia Council surveys, *Arts Facts* posters and newspaper advertisements from the Australia Council identified the arts and arts-related industries as forming a $3.8 billion industry. Highly labour intensive, and expanding at more than three times the rate of the general workforce, the arts and related industry groups had a turnover that was comparable to those of Australia's petroleum and coal production industries.

Many of the arguments for the need for cultural reassessment and research and development were similar to those used by the similarly beleaguered scientific research groups. For example, Rhonda Galbally, director of the Commission for the Future, said in 1987:

> It's no good separating science and biotechnology from culture and creativity. The arts give us a respect, understanding and enhancement of Australian culture which is absolutely essential if we're going to have a

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[432]David Marr 'Cents and Sensibility' *Sydney Morning Herald* July 12 1996 Arts 13

[433]Tim Rowse *Arguing the Arts* (1985) 116

> uniquely Australian productivity - especially in the design and quality of exports.[434]

The response in the art world was not merely a joining in with the flow of current arguments for slices of the various funding cakes. Having invested as much time in their careers as any other professionals, they wanted to make their art work for them. They argued that for too long artists including practitioners in all arts fields, including the crafts, as well as writers, dancers and others) had accepted the view that their low remuneration was the penalty paid for their art being to do with pleasure and personal choice rather than work, or that they had a responsibility, through, for example, donating works for charities or giving free demonstrations, to provide these services for the cultural and educational good of society. As *When are You Going to get a Real Job?* this perception was deliberately reflected in the title of David Throsby and Devon Mills's economic study of Australian Artists for the Australia Council in 1989.[435]

It was realised that because art had not been considered 'work', many visual artists and craftspeople had no tangible measures of payment for many of the activities they carried out as part of their professional life. Performing artists could be paid by the hour, but the gallery system provided only for income at the point of sale. Other professional activities, such as lectures, demonstrations and consultative advice, normally charged for by, for example, architects, designers and doctors, were more often than not expected to be given free. Something had to be decided about conditions of service for artists-in-residence, artists working in the community, and those researching and presenting exhibitions or writing articles. Art and crafts production was not clearly visible as a work option in employment services or census statistics, and artists often identified themselves by their subsidising occupation.

Not only did governments and the general public have to alter their perceptions, but artists needed to as well. In discussing cultural rights, the chair of the Australia Council, Donald Horne, said in 1985:

> ...we must also seek forms of organising new experience, forming new perspectives, constructing new perspectives of the world, and the place humans might play...But if we accept that right we have to consider the problem of art production in a modern industrial society...we expect our artists to subsidise the community in ways we do not expect from for example museum curators, librarians, scientists or university professors.[436]

Changes started on a number of fronts. At one level, artists formed themselves into a number of lobby groups and membership unions that

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[434]Rhonda Galbally, cited in Martin Portius *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 May 1987

[435]David Throsby and Devon Mills's report for the Australia Council: *When are You Going to get a Real Job? an economic study of Australian Artists* (1989)

[436]Donald Horne 'The Arts and the Economy' (paper) Australia Council February 1985

advocated changes in attitudes and working practices. In this sense, artists were organising themselves in the ways in which the Crafts Councils had done over a decade before. They became interested in some of the issues the Crafts Councils had already addressed, such as changes to sales tax laws, small business management, fee scales, marketing and employment alternatives. At another level, state and federal cultural ministers met for the first time in Perth in 1979. Bodies such as the Australia Council, state arts funding bodies and education institutions started compiling information and commissioning reports to identify the scope of what now became described as 'the arts industry'. In 1982 the conference Future Challenge: Administering the Arts in the '80s, the first large-scale national conference on administration in the arts, was held at the Adelaide Festival. Various courses were soon established around the country to help train people in this task.

The Artworkers Union was formed in Sydney in 1979, following demonstrations at the 1979 Sydney Biennale, where, in their protests and in their fringe publication *White Elephant, Red Herring*, artists demanded to know why there was not greater Australian representation and 50 per cent female participation. This group effectively managed, among other things, to negotiate with the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards a scale of fees for loan of work for exhibitions, a policy that became effective from the early 1980s and became accepted practice for all loan exhibitions of contemporary work.

During the 1980s the merits of registering an artists' group as a trade union were discussed by a number of artists groups like the Artworkers Union.[437] At that time, facing possible future amalgamation of 'craft-based' unions to create 'industry-based' unions, and the need to increase membership, some existing trade unions, in particular the Operative Painters and Decorators Unions in Victoria and Western Australia, sought to include artists among their members, starting with those who had been working on art projects on building sites. By 1991 the advantages of having support, such as clearly identified working terms and conditions for artists like muralists, were being considered against the disadvantages of strict controls imposed by these unions.[438]

In 1983 the issues associated with treating art as work prompted the establishment of the Arts Law Centre, funded by the Australia Council to advise artists on legal matters. Director Shane Simpson published *The Visual Artist and the Law* in 1982, and the long-planned associated Arts

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[437]The New South Wales Artworkers Union in Sydney had gained partial trade union registration in that state by the nineties; the Artworkers Alliance in Queensland discussed the issue and resolved to remain an advocacy group.

[438]In Victoria, for example, controls ranged from compulsory unionism for anyone on site, including government funding agency staff organising public art programs, to suggestions of possible industrial action if architects did not use 'union' artists for artworks in buildings being constructed.

Accountancy scheme was also set up as part of the centre's activity in 1985. The 1985 annual report showed that visual artists were the largest user group of the centre, with music and crafts equal second, and that enquiries covered aspects of contract, copyright, employment, insurance, tax and obscenity.

Along the lines of the Experimental Arts Foundation (1975) in Adelaide, major contemporary art spaces were established in each state in the 1980s,[439] and numerous other artist-run spaces emerged as well. A national network that extended opportunities for visual artists and craftspeople, through touring exhibitions, and providing administrative and curatorial involvement in them, was the National Exhibition Touring Services (NETS) scheme.[440] At the same time, Community Arts Network offices, generally jointly funded by federal, state and local governments to house community arts officers, also existed in all capital cities. Wayne Hutchins's book *Artists at Work: Your Rights and Responsibilities* (1987) gave legal, financial and administrative advice, particularly for artists working in the community.

One of the most exciting and influential conferences about arts and the community in the late 1980s was the Creative City conference in Melbourne in 1988. And in 1981 twenty organisations had met to form the National Arts Industry Training Committee (NAITC), one of twenty committees of the Australian Council for Education and Training (ACET), designed to provide a major forum of advice on employment and training in art-based industries.

From about 1975 to 1977 the directors of the Crafts Council of Australia, Musica Viva and the Australian Gallery Directors Council (AGDC) formed Arts Lobby, through which the organisations' chairpeople went with their directors to Canberra each year to raise matters of common interest with the Minister for the Arts. The Visual Arts Lobby, later the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), which included the crafts, was formed in 1983, supported by the Australia Council through various boards, when it was realised once again that, compared with the well-established performing arts and music unions, there was no cohesive force or voice for the visual arts. The Arts Alliance was established in 1986 to present a combined art form force to lobby, exchange information and be a point of contact.[441] When the

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[439]First Artspace in Sydney, and then Praxis (later PICA) in Fremantle, the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne, Chameleon in Hobart, then Contemporary Art Spaces in Canberra and Darwin. An Australian Centre for Photography had also formed in the early 1970s, a specialist organisation set up at the same time as the Crafts Council of Australia.

[440]NETS was established in 1985 by the Australia Council's Visual Arts and Crafts Boards, in conjunction with state funding, and succeeded the defunct Australian Gallery Directors Council. It operated in association with the Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency (AETA), a national touring agency (until 1996) to bring exhibitions to regional and non-government galleries, and an information network through the Arts Museums Association of Australia (AMAA).

[441]The Arts Alliance comprised twelve arts organisations, including the Crafts Council of Australia, NAVA and the Artworkers Union, and the Community Arts Networks.

Australia Council's funding was reduced by a million dollars, and its structure threatened by the recommendations of the McLeay Report in 1986, the Alliance mounted Future Arts Rallies in all capital cities to defend the funding principles of the council.[442]

Representatives of crafts organisations were central to many of these professional co-ordinating and lobby groups that now made up an organised professional art and craft network throughout the country. The Crafts Council of Australia was involved in the development of many of the new groups, and the Crafts Board and later Visual Arts/Crafts Board in funding some of them. Artists and craftspeople extended their own professional experience through participation in administration, policy development and programs. They in turn benefited from the professional gains made by the efforts of these groups, in setting up a professional working framework for the arts, like any other professional working framework.

In theory, if not in practice, there was now a framework where visual artists and craftspeople could be considered together - as workers in a cultural industry. It was now also possible, in theory if not in practice, to consider crafts ideals as significant on their own terms, without the defining imprimatur of art values alone.

A changing infrastructure

Education

During the 1980s a number of significant structural changes occurred, which affected the purpose and practice of education in the arts, and identity of crafts education within the overall provision of visual arts education. These changes were to contribute to challenges to the crafts movement's perception of art ideals, and indeed, to perceptions of what the crafts themselves might now be, and where their histories and allegiances lay - and might lead.

The decline in teacher education enrolments in the early 1980s, as well as a pruning of education funding, meant that a number of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were amalgamated, and for many this meant that some art departments or schools became part of multi-campus institutes where they competed with other non-arts courses for funds.[443] Many of these institutions, some of them former teachers colleges, began to offer, for survival reasons,

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[442]The Arts Alliance press releases in 1986 argued that the arts industry at that time comprised 120 000 people, contributed $6.5 billion to the Australian economy, paid $360 million in personal income tax, took only about 52 per cent of the Commonwealth government's entire arts and cultural budget, and was created by artists whose average annual income was less than $10,000.

[443]Interview with Geoff Parr (1990) who pointed out that studio equipment and materials for processes such as photography, film, fibre, clay, glass, wood and metal, and later audio and video art, were more costly than those required for painting and drawing. Many of the art departments were never adequately resourced within their larger institutions for such developments, either in facilities or in recurrent funding.

full-time and part-time undergraduate associate diploma programs in the visual arts and crafts. A number of art schools started making wider connections with the community, which few had thought was necessary before. They picked up a great many students who had previously been unable to go beyond adult education or society and guild training, because they had been unable to study full-time. This effort was partly because of a need for community support, and for enrolment numbers, but also because of the changing and more democratic nature of art practice at that time. Summer schools, seminars and conferences were hosted, galleries maintained and catalogues published, and connections made with Crafts Councils, Contemporary Art Spaces and artist-run galleries and studios. Visiting lecturer programs were established; residencies and workshops continued; and some public and community programs embarked on.

Another result of the economic circumstances of tertiary art education, was to increase student enrolments by extending courses into higher degrees. During the 1980s, masters courses were developed in a number of institutions, so that for the first time students did not have to travel overseas for postgraduate study; by the mid-1980s it was possible to study at a masters level in Australia in every major crafts area, and by the 1990s doctoral opportunities were offered in some schools as well. Lecturers in art schools felt increasing pressure to upgrade their own qualifications, as the courses they were teaching were upgraded.

In some art schools, 'cultural theory' or 'art theory' started to be discussed in conjunction with art history, and by the mid-1980s, many also realised that some form of vocational studies course was necessary for students to be able to address the complexities of making a living in the arts, after graduation. A number of institutions made a conscious commitment to the option of designer-making for future small production, alongside, or instead of, the by now more common, craft-as-art direction. However, not all students, or all staff, or even all institutions, shared a commitment to these directions, and for many the separations between art, craft, design and teacher education were still clearly defined and upheld.

For many years, technical colleges and CAEs had been critical of the favoured treatment of universities in relation to research funding, staffing resources and status. The 'binary system' of tertiary education, which was perceived to separate vocational training from intellectual studies, was no longer acceptable to many.[444] In 1987, further reform proposals were announced through federal education minister John Dawkins's Green Paper on tertiary education. The proposals recommended further amalgamations of

[444]See Stephen Murray-Smith, Anthony John Dare *The Tech, a Centenary History of RMIT* (1987) 452-9, for a criticism of the 'binary system' of institutions, which, associated with the development of universities, tended to place research opportunities and resources only into the academic arena; so that by the late 1960s technical colleges had been left under-resourced to run sub-tertiary certificate courses.

tertiary institutions, competition for resources, private sponsorship and a focus on a vocationally specific education; it anticipated changes to tenure for staff and forecast a reintroduction of student fees. The new moves were unpopular: it had already been said by commentators and politicians themselves that government was now run like a corporate business, which paid less attention to ideology than to economic management.[445] In the long term the proposed Unified National System of education eliminated CAEs, and provided a range of universities on the one hand, and state-run TAFE college systems on the other, with art schools or departments in both. By 1990 most educational institutions had amalgamated towards these ends.

By this stage, many of the art schools that had moved with their CAEs to out-of-town campuses in the 1970s were trying to move back to the central city, where, they believed, the art interests of their students were more oriented.[446] During the 1980s some of the major technical institutes also sought university status, and the art departments in these institutions became university faculties or colleges.[447] In 1996 Sophia Errey noted that the 18 universities and 100 CAEs operating in 1977 had collapsed into 36 universities.[448]

Some design departments in the former CAEs had argued against the 1970s philosophy of allying art and design, saying their field had become so specialised in its use of technology and in the way designers addressed themselves to their social task, and that art had removed itself so far from social and shared symbolic links with its society, that the continued

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[445]David McKnight *Sydney Morning Herald* December 1987, documented some of the common concerns felt by those in art schools, noting that 'the 126-page Green Paper...takes one paragraph to mention goals and purposes of education other than those connected with economic growth and restrained government spending'. In making education more responsive to economic demands, he observed that many feared a depletion of funding for the humanities and social sciences, believing that 'commercial values will intrude even further through research, course content, and choice of staff.'

[446]For example, the local press in Adelaide, for example, in 1988 and 1989 documented the desire of the South Australian School of Art at the SACAE at Underdale to move back to the city. The School of Art in Hobart struggled out of its place in the TCAE, and joined the University of Tasmania in the early 1980s, eventually operating as the Centre for the Arts in the city, from 1986. In the 1990s the Queensland College of Art was attempting to return from its suburban campus to the Brisbane city area.

[447]The Western Australian Institute of Technology became Curtin University in 1987; the New South Wales Institute of Technology became the University of Technology, Sydney in 1988; and the Darwin Institute of Technology, which grew out of the Darwin Community College in 1984, became the Northern Territory University in 1989. Numerous amalgamations occurred in Melbourne, with institutions housing art schools or departments becoming part of, for example, Monash University, Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and the new University of Victoria. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the largest of the CAEs and institutes, was the last to finalise its university status.

[448]Sophia Errey 'Going a Degree Higher' *Lemel*, Summer 1995-6 2, citing Don Aitken 'The Astonishing Rise of Higher Education' *Quadrant* Jan-Feb 1996 77-82

association of design with art schools hindered and smothered it. In the various institutional amalgamations, a number of design departments wanted to associate themselves more closely with technology and design for production than with philosophies of art or art-craft.[449] Students entering some institutions to study, for example, jewellery or ceramics, found their allegiance to either art (as expression) or design (for production) made for them by the structure of the institution, with little opportunity to experience the other point of view, and the history and theory associated with it.[450] As well, by the 1990s many of the major design faculties were advocating 'green design' or 'integrated' design, where all aspects of design - interior, graphic, environmental and industrial - were considered in the context of social and environmental responsibility.

By the nineties, art departments in technical colleges were particularly concerned by the expectation, in New South Wales at least, that Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses should be 50 per cent funded by industry within a number of years, because many of their courses had no immediate industries to sponsor training or equipment. There were also controversial moves to develop national competency-based training curricula for TAFE courses,[451] and it became necessary to rationalise courses across institutions, and to define what 'industry' might mean in the arts.

By 1996 it was clear, with further fee increases to students, and further funding cuts to universities by the new federal Liberal government, that Australia was unlikely to be able to sustain the approximately 40 university art schools (some institutions had multiple campuses) that currently operated. Within all art schools, cuts in funding increased the problem of trying to fund the resource-expensive courses of both the visual arts and crafts, especially within a university system that was oriented, by and large, to tuition in mass lecture rooms. Many sought solvency through reducing costs by offering early retirement for staff, and increasing income through enrolling foreign fee-paying students. University management and heads of schools also started to seriously consider amalgamating departments and schools, closing

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[449]This was one argument used by the Design School at Sydney College of the Arts, when opting to separate from the Art School and its amalgamation to Sydney University, and join instead the University of Technology, Sydney.

[450]In the Underdale campus of the South Australian CAE, for example, in 1986 jewellery was taught in the design school, ceramics in the art school, and glass as part of teacher education.

[451]In New South Wales, for example, an Arts and Media Industry division was one of seven divisions set up by TAFE, and in 1991 Rod Bamford was appointed first industry specialist for ceramics. His job was to consult with industry and review ceramics courses in TAFE colleges. At this stage there was very little ceramics manufacturing industry in Australia, and apart from colleges such as Holmesglen in Melbourne which offered industrial training, most TAFE colleges courses had been focused on studio production. At RMIT in Melbourne, responding to a need to be competitive in exports, courses were offered in 1991 to train paraprofessionals in the furniture industry in production planning and supervision, quality control and marketing.

courses, and focusing on centres of specialisation rather than providing a broad program in each institution.

One of the repercussions of funding cutbacks in art schools was the pruning of administrative costs through amalgamating 'like' departments such as painting and printmaking. This meant that new juxtapositions were made for crafts courses, such as subsuming ceramics, textiles, jewellery and glass departments into either sculpture or design; or amalgamating them as departments of three-dimensional studies in opposition to sculpture. In many of these amalgamations, the specific characteristics and qualities of crafts histories and processes tended to be overwhelmed by both art ideals and design (and technology) ideals.

There was now also a noticeable change in student demand for vocational education. It was evident to those enrolling students in art schools that there was a shift of interest from crafts courses offering personal expression and development, to those offering more vocationally oriented 'design' programs - not only crafts-design courses like ceramics, textiles and metalwork, but also industrial, product, fashion, graphic and computer-aided design courses.[452] These were more likely to ensure that graduates would earn a living. A major factor in the choice was now the requirement that students pay fees for tertiary education. By the 1990s, the system of mark scalings in the secondary school Higher School Certificate, which was perceived to favour scientific and vocational subjects over liberal arts subjects, was also considered to be affecting entries to art schools. Students started to seek more advantageous courses in secondary school in order to be accepted into universities.

Contributing to this circumstance was a revision of secondary school curricula in the 1990s, where, apart from the visual arts, a new emphasis was placed on design and technology studies. While this direction also applied to science, the teaching of these new subjects was mostly carried out in art and craft departments. The change in emphasis was met with some concern as many values associated with crafts practice, such as the expression of ideas through a concern for materials and skills, and the importance to the individual of crafts production as a way of life, now appeared not to be taken into account. The word 'craft' had now been largely eliminated from art, design and technology syllabus statements.[453] Thus, secondary students enrolling in art schools had had little preliminary experience of the crafts, and nor had the teachers who advised them. [454]

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[452]Interview with David Williams (1995)

[453]See Lee Emery *Art Teachers Teaching Technology Studies: A Research Study* (1989); see also 'Draft Design and Technology (7-10) Syllabus' New South Wales Education Department (1991)

[454]Interview with Helge Larsen (1993)

By the mid-1990s art and design schools within universities were finding, further, that the provision of research grants through the Australian Research Council, the major body for funding university research, was heavily weighted to the sciences rather than the humanities, which now included schools of art and design. Within the humanities, and with regard to both the examination of higher degrees and the application for research funds, art schools found they had to argue the nature of 'research' in the making of artworks, against disciplines that had always depended on written documentation of research findings.[455]

Sophia Errey suggested that here, the crafts streams of the visual arts:

...were in many respects better placed in relationship to the practice of research than other areas, and perhaps paradoxically, that a conceptual orientation is not an overriding advantage. Investigation of materials and techniques, whether contemporary high-tech or historical, development of tools (in the widest sense) and processes, evaluation of production and commercial feasibilities are all extremely important aspects of practice which overlap with traditionally defined technical, scientific and economic disciplines, while simultaneously interacting with aesthetic potentialities.[456]

In this regard, in the 1990s the glass workshop and the textiles workshop at the Canberra School of Art, and the post-graduate ceramic production studio at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart were among those that successfully gained substantial university research funding for equipment to carry out expansion to their research programs.

In response to these various challenges, some art schools in the early 1990s developed new 'design and production' programs like the post-graduate courses in furniture design and production ceramics at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart; the textile design course at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; and the Centre for Ceramic Research, Design and Production at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur. These institutions worked towards an ideology of a viable design and production practice and a relationship with industry.

Others started to suggest that if students in crafts courses, like ceramics, wanted to make sculpture they had to be also enrolled in, or assessed in, the sculpture department. These shifts were a radical departure from the art-oriented emphasis of a decade earlier.

The prevailing model provided by fine arts and art history/theory departments of art schools remained that of arts ideals (reflecting the experience of most of the staff), although crafts and design issues were taught in some

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[455]See Peter Hill 'Is there a doctor in the art school?' *Art Monthly Australia* October 1995 and 'Mrs Aristotle's Teeth: the challenges for research funding in art schools' *Art Monthly Australia* November, 1995, and subsequent letters to the editor.

[456]Sophia Errey op cit (1995-96) 3

institutions, and specific histories and issues were discussed in studio areas. But by the mid-1990s visual artists themselves were expressing concern at what was being taught. While artist and lecturer Pat Hoffie thought that the move of art schools to universities did a lot to shake out some of the complacencies of art lecturers in the seventies and eighties who had been trained by 'a process of education-by-osmosis', and where 'all an art teacher had to do was hang around for his (usually his) artistic genius to rub off', she nonetheless observed a growing sense of unease about the kind of information that was being disseminated. 'It became almost *de rigeur* for art students to assume a "critical position" even before they had acquired sufficient knowledge to back it up' she said:

> More focus was placed on emulating contemporary styles than on gaining knowledge and skills. So-called 'critical art practice' was often more a veneer-thin adoption of *style* than an informed, engaged response to ideas. It was enough for a work to look 'alternative' (that is, for the creator to have successfully feigned total disregard for aesthetics and craftsmanship) for it to be accepted as critical. A 'bad art' look and a 'bad attitude' automatically meant that you were posing a critical assessment of outmoded values. But it was often difficult to tell whether it might all have just been the result of complete ineptitude.[457]

Indeed, some lecturers of sculpture were agreeing in 1997, that recent interest in making 'installation' works, usually with found objects, had resulted in a recent generation of students who had few skills (other than photocopying) with which to resolve their ideas and could not 'make anything', even with basic welding and joinery.[458]

What did this mean for the crafts? Did craftspeople still need to pursue art ideals that were contradictory to their practices, especially if the visual arts were now (or again) advocating some crafts ideals? Or were they still two distinct, but related, approaches? How did the wider field respond to changes in approach?

Funding

At the same time as education was 'rationalised', a similar economic and ideological rationalisation of administration of the arts in the Australia Council saw the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards (see Chapter 4). While there were many positive aspects to the notion of shared ideals and joint funding, it was noticable that not only were craftspeople receiving a smaller proportion of grant funding, but that fewer were applying in the first place.

Of those craftspeople who were successful, the tendency was to support those whose work mostly resembled 'art' or took its place in the art world infrastructures. This occurred despite efforts to find alternative grant

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[457]Pat Hoffie *Art Monthly Australia* May 1996 89 4-6

[458]Interview with Colin Reaney (1997)

programs for craftspeople and designers; despite a clear revision of objectives amongst many practitioners themselves about the direction of their work, and its audience or market; and a clear revaluation of the status of artists as part of the workforce. At the same time, both the visual arts and the crafts were now competing with a new genre: the as yet ill-defined art practice associated with 'new technologies' that combined, for example, videos, computers and internet information technology.

By 1992 a strong lobby was mounted to identify and redress some of the perceived inequities between 'art' and 'craft' in both education and funding.[459] It became increasingly clear, although by no means commonly accepted, that it was no longer always in the best interests of craftspeople to try to join art as a preferred option, but to define more clearly the identity of their practice, and insist that others acknowledge it as a valid alternative with its own set of histories and traditions.

The ideals that craftspeople held and the work that they produced, were not only the result of new education and funding opportunities. They were also affected by the both the changing demands of the marketplace and the opportunities it presented.

A changing marketplace

Developing confidence in their own histories and traditions, and reflecting changes in values, craftspeople started to seek different markets from those in the art world. Alongside an increasing market for unique objects, they also developed a number of 'commercial' options that had previously been associated by the art world with a loss of professional artistic integrity.

Contributing to confusion of identity in the visual arts and crafts, was the way in which some government departments perpetuated hierarchies through laws dealing with sales and income taxation, customs and employment. In each of these areas, guidelines remained in place that no longer reflected, in either education or funding institutions, the ways in which the identity and value of the arts were now assessed. For example, while it was acknowledged that a work of art was no longer simply a painting or sculpture, the defending potter in a test case for sales tax exemption in 1990 had still to demonstrate his intent to make articles that had aesthetic appeal, within an interpretation of the 'fine arts' as 'any application of skill and taste to the production of articles which are beautiful in themselves or which have appeal to aesthetic taste'.[460]

The art-craft market: an ideal

The art-craft ideal was still very much a priority for many. There was, in fact,

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[459]See for example Darani Lewers 'The Crafts in Crisis' *Art Monthly Australia* 47 March 1992 14-16

[460]Natasha Serventy 'Pots Pass the Test' *Eyeline* 12 1992 12-13

a marked expansion in the market for unique art-craft objects, particularly the affluent private markets of the United States, but also in Japan.

Many craftspeople expanded their preference, as an ideal, to produce such major virtuoso works for public and private collections. Even though they sometimes ran a concurrent production business, or became involved in commissions for public spaces, the 'collector's item' or 'museum piece' remained, as in the art world, the aspect of their practice that was most attractive. It not only provided an opportunity for conceptual and technical challenges, but also a larger selling price for the effort than that for many small items, an important line on a curriculum vitae and moreover, the attraction of reinforcement of a status as an artist.

The best works were well-researched, well-designed and skilfully made by craftspeople who were critically informed about issues to do with ideals and identity. They were also often those that retained a connection, sometimes metaphorical, with previous forms and functions and where the materials and processes of production contributed to the meaning of the work *(see for example, Plate 16: following page).*

However, expansion of this market was not without criticism, especially where the objects made for it were identified as sculpture. Encouraged by art ideals, craftspeople had tended to deny that they were making decorative objects or ornaments in favour of a term that implied greater intellect.

Even works that were described as something else were still presented as art objects in certain contexts. For example, reviewing the exhibition Australia: New Design Visions, in Perth in 1992, Peter Timms asked:

> Which of these objects were individual showpieces...which were prototypes capable of production and which were designed in response to a particular industry commission? Surely [being design] they were not all intended purely as personal artistic expressions?[461]

But of course, they were: none of those selected had been intended as designs for production.

Australian public and private collections were not large enough to sustain all those who sought fulfilment through having their work acquired in this way. Eyes were turned towards the larger, richer populations and markets overseas, especially those of the United States and Asia. From the mid-1980s strong connections started to develop between Australian craftspeople and international dealers, galleries, exhibitions, art schools and collectors.

With the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards in 1987, the new board tried to provide equity between the two areas: support was given to individuals and organisations taking Australian crafts overseas, and events

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[461] Peter Timms, 'Designing Visions - Australian Work at the Craft Triennial' *CraftWest* Summer 1992 9

Plate 16: Brian Hirst
(see page 170) Bowl, *Votive Bowl*, blown-cast glass, hand-finished, decorated with gold lustre and diamond-point engraving, made in Sydney in 1992. (29 x 34 x 30cm)

Brian Hirst (b.1956) is interested in ancient vessel forms, and especially Cycladic art from around 3000-2000BC. This bowl form is derived from ancient three-footed bronzes from a range of cultures such as in Mexico and China. The decoration, however, is a development of a number of personal iconographic motifs he uses on other works. Hirst also studied printmaking, and likes to exhibit some of his bowls in front of prints etched on glass, that depict the same form in two dimensions. As well as these large one-off pieces, which are exhibited successfully and collected overseas as well as in Australia, Brian Hirst is equally involved in making blown production wares for retail, as well as taking on a range of large and small commissions for awards and corporate gifts.

and venues were sought that might be the equivalent of major promotions for visual artists such as the Venice Biennale in Italy and the Documenta exhibition in Germany. As part of its focus on the support of its professional constituency, and its resultant export strategy, the Crafts Council of Australia worked from 1991 with the Australia Council and Austrade to co-ordinate dealer galleries at the Chicago New Art Forms Exposition (CINAFE), and later Sculpture, Object, Functional Arts (SOFA), with a view to developing 'top-end' markets and market connections for Australian craftspeople.

The work that was of most interest to this particular market was the 'art-craft' object, and indeed, CINAFE included specifically, the term 'New Art Forms' in its title. As collectors became familiar with the work over the ensuing years, and the 'names' of the people who made it, some Australians developed strong markets in the United States (as well as Europe and Japan), made connections with dealer galleries, and were visited in Australia by travelling groups of collectors. The success of a few fuelled the interest of many others, who aspired to the same acclaim, income and opportunity to make large one-off pieces.

These collectors represented the whole spectrum of the crafts, but the most noticeable were those collecting glass.[462] 'If you can't afford art', the rationale was given, 'with a million dollars you can develop a collection of glass-art instead'.[463] By the 1990s in the United States, the efforts of a few key dealer galleries, combined with the strong presence of affluent glass collectors and the establishment of specialist museum collections, and about forty glass education and training courses, provided a combined circumstance that was far beyond what occurred for any other media outside painting-related art, and which prompted great envy and admiration in Australia.[464] Glass artists responded by making the works that this market demanded: a product had little or no other function than to be collected, and which most closely approximated art, that is, a sculptural object. The positive view of this phenomenon, was that patronage of any sort whether collectors, working spouses, state funding bodies or royal courts, had always offered opportunity through sustained time for research into ideas, and experimental, technical and production challenges otherwise not affordable.

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[462]See Grace Cochrane 'Collecting our Thoughts' *Art Monthly Australia* June 1993, for an extended discussion on the role of collectors of 'art-craft' objects.

[463]Discussion with glass collectors at Ausglass conference, Canberra 1991

[464]The 400 members of the Art Alliance, an organisation of glass collectors originally set up around the Heller Gallery in New York in the early 1980s, organised weekends for exhibitions and collecting, while members built extra rooms and specific buildings to house their personal collections. They helped establish a glass workshop and a glass magazine; supported scholarships to train glassmakers; organised conferences, and in one weekend in the early 1990s, with 20-odd dealer stalls; turned over $650,000 in sales, a percentage of which was turned back into training scholarships.

But the phenomenon also had its critics. The Western art market had long encouraged the making of works whose only purpose and function was to appear on gallery walls and in gallery spaces. In Australia, Ian Burn and Annette van den Bosch were just two who had independently discussed the effect the art market has had on art production.[465] British critic Peter Dormer criticised the development of this kind of work, across a range of crafts media, and blamed the collectors for encouraging it:

> This phenomenon is most widespread in America, where there are many rich men and women prepared to buy the work for their new art-craft collections. The collections are frequently appalling and are, in essence, handicraft gone to fat. Nothing in art or design or architecture or craft is more foolish than the sight of modest ideas ballooning and buffeting on the thermals of rich ignorance.[466]

In particular, the massive network support for 'art-glass' could be seen to be provoking an artificial product, a 'super-niche' product, where, significant as the best pieces may have been, most had had no function outside a collection, and not everyone agreed they worked as 'art'.[467] For these collectors of glass the chase was thrilling; the presentation of trophies competitive. They did not have to buy as part of any wider understanding that might contribute to their judgement, as, for example, a museum might. Collectors were mobile and very aware of the scope, scale and movement of the market. Usually successful business people in another part of their lives, they knew how to research, how to set up supporting frameworks and how to organise 'deals'.

Many of the collectors saw as the end point for their collections, their incorporation (often as complete collections) into public art museums. But despite their interest in, and dependence on, donated collections,[468] museums in Australia at least, knew they could rarely take entire unselected collections whose initiating acquisition policy might not always be shared by the institution. It was clear that there were many more kinds of works being produced than 'art-craft', and many practices in other media that also had to be considered as well.

Australian craftspeople, through the topics addressed at their conferences and the lateral ways in which many organised their practices, consistently demonstrated by the 1990s a noticeable self-critical assessment of their work practice from their geographical 'margins', that was not always as evident in

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[465]Ian Burn 'The 60s: Crisis and Aftermath' (1981) reprinted in *Dialogues* (1991) 108,111; and Annette van den Bosch 'A Taste for the New: Corporate Art Collections, Museums and the Art Market in the United States and Australia' *Art and Australia* 30 2 Summer (1992) 226-237

[466]Peter Dormer 'The Ideal World of Vermeer's Little Lacemaker' in John Thackara *Design after Modernism* (1988) 142

[467]See Susanne Frantz op cit (1991) for a critique of this field, also discussed in Chapter 1.

[468]Collections in Australia are greatly enhanced by the opportunity for taxation incentives to donors, through the Taxation Incentives for the Arts scheme.

the attitudes of those in the 'centres' overseas.[469] Supported by their enthusiastic market, some of those overseas appear not always to have been forced to assess their work in a wider context. As John Bentley-Mays had observed from the United States in 1985:

> ...the quest for certification has undammed a sea of incredibly vulgar, imitative 'clay art' and 'fiber art' - a flow that continues to the present day, unchecked by a craft press that is too cozy with the people it should be criticizing, and far too enchanted by the goal of validation itself to say much about emperors and new clothes.[470]

While Australian craftspeople aspired to the support and acclaim of these enthusiastic markets, by the 1990s the best work of those seeking connections with art ideals was nonetheless demonstrating evidence of a more critical awareness of the richness of crafts histories and of the contradictory relationships between the crafts and art. Fewer actually called their work 'art': they spoke more specifically of, for example, tapestry, glasswork, ceramics or metalwork, whether or not the work was utilitarian or interpretive in intent. Those making interpretive work appeared more inclined to draw on the previous forms and functions of their field, rather than simulate what they (or some of their audiences) thought sculpture was meant to look like. These works were informed from their own broad histories, rather than being, as had been more prevalent fifteen years before, a superficial attempt to look like art.

Design and production: an alternative

Australians were conscious that their less affluent marketplace and smaller population could not sustain livelihoods through making expensive unique objects alone. As they developed broader views of crafts practice they started to explore the broader marketplace associated with them.

It was recognised that, for well-designed objects, the marketplace could be legitimately expanded, and that exhibitions could also include such events as trade fairs, fashion parades and shop showcases. Much of this work was sold, or intended to be sold, less in galleries than in shops and boutiques, department stores and design showrooms, or was commissioned by architects and interior designers for public, commercial and corporate buildings.[471] In

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[469]These comments are based on attendance at conferences of ceramics, jewellery and metalsmithing, glass and textiles over 10 years in Australia, listening to contributions from Australian and overseas practitioners; study tour in the United States and Great Britain in 1992; attendance at the 1995 GAS (Glass Artists Society) conference in the United States; and personal discussions with practitioners and curators from a number of countries.

[470]John Bentley Mays 'Comment' *American Craft* Oct/Nov 1985

[471]In the late 1980s for example, Whitehall Industries in Melbourne established a link with the Artists Garden at the Fitzroy Garden Shop; boutiques like Cash Palace in Sydney displayed contemporary jewellery with fashion clothes; the exhibition La Boutique

relation to business and the marketplace, Garth Clark in the United States said in 1987:

> We...need to realise that the world of the applied arts is a sleeping giant that has the potential of offering...a challenging home from which to grow intellectually and commercially...which can present the craftsmaker in the context of traditions from which work has evolved.[472]

From 1981 to 1987, and again in 1991, the Crafts Council of Australia organised a series of Craft Expo trade fairs. In some ways these were a development from the crafts markets that had been a characteristic of the crafts movement both in Australia and overseas for thirty years. Craftspeople who took stalls at Expo were able to take direct orders as well as make sales, and make personal contacts with outlets and those wanting to commission. Similar results occurred with various fashion shows and furniture trade fairs.[473]

New skills were needed to market the work in different ways. At the 1981 Conference of Production Workshop Managers, about thirty managers met in Adelaide to discuss training, workshop development, production management and design and marketing and promotion. Crafts councils also organised a range of training programs, such as the Crafts Council of New South Wales which organised a month-long course in 1988 to train potential marketing 'crafts agents', and also launched the service Designed and Made in 1989, to promote the commissioning of work for corporate gifts and public art.

By this stage a number of designer-makers, particularly of furniture and 'art-clothing', were also making their own contacts for marketing, and sometimes production, overseas. For those wanting to make a high quality design production line, it was clear that again, markets in, for example, Tokyo and the United States were better than in Australia, where the buying population was smaller. In 1985 the Texas store chain Neiman-Marcus decided to promote Australian works through its Dallas store in 1986; and in late 1988 the marketing and buying group Uniquely Australian, acting as an international marketing agent for furniture and a range of interior design products, started selecting the work of Australian designers for contract production in Australia, and sale and display in Los Angeles. A number of opportunities also opened up through Japanese department store galleries.

Fantastique was shown in a department store in Adelaide in 1990 and in 1991 David Jones in Sydney placed craftworks in prime window display spaces.

[472]Garth Clark *American Craft* Dec 86/Jan 87 vol 46/6 14

[473]Examples include Fashion Expo in Sydney in 1985, the Winter Collections in Tasmania from 1983 to 1985 and events organised by the Fashion Design Council in Victoria; the 1985 Australian Furnishing Expo "85, which included furniture prototypes from nine designers and nine furniture-makers; Sydney's Darling Harbour Furniture Exhibitions from 1988, and later DESIGNEX trade fairs in Sydney and Melbourne.

The Meat Market Crafts Centre in Melbourne was associated with the Nieman-Marcus scheme, set up a pilot Craft Export Agency in 1988, and organised Australian participation at the New York Gift Fair in 1989, to which individuals made their own connections from 1990. From Sydney, the Crafts Council of Australia started to develop information and skills to assist in this new area, making it a major area of activity from 1989 through a Craft Export Strategy proposal for major international crafts promotion.

Efforts were also made by numbers of individuals and groups to use opportunities provided by the federal government's advisory and marketing agency for exports overseas, Austrade. In 1989 Senator Button, federal Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, held a design summit conference in Canberra. He also commissioned consultants to report on the export of Australian manufacturing industries and the role of the government trade advisory service, Austrade, which included, in a small way, the export of craft and design products. By the nineties, the Visual Arts/Craft Board also recognised that marketing was becoming a crucial element for all visual artists and craftspeople, and that a range of strategies was necessary.

Some special groups emerged, such as the Crafts Council of Victoria's Practising Craftspeople Australia (PCA) program from 1984, which concentrated on marketing, publicising and promoting those who were making a living solely from their production. Established to help practising craftspeople to run their businesses successfully, CCV said: 'What they have in common is a way of making a living...They make it.' This project was developed further in 1997 by the national crafts council body, now called Craft Australia, as the national Craftmark branding scheme, as a way of identifying approved quality wares. By the 1990s Craft Australia had established a franchise in David Jones stores in Sydney, as a marketing model where a number of craftspeople made a commitment to supply agreed works, which were sold through the ceramics and glassware department along with commercial products.

Commissions: crafts in the wider world

For those pursuing art ideals, commissions for clients had also been seen as leading to a loss of individual, creative, artistic independence. But commissions could also provide challenges that stretched both imagination and skills in projects that brought a new, public and often permanent audiences.

The 1980s saw an increase in the numbers of commissions, and also in the ways in which some of them were carried out. From 1979 to 1989 over 3000 commissions had been registered on the Crafts Council of Australia's *Craftline* register, which still represented only a small proportion of what was carried out. Many commissions were associated with community projects for stained glass windows or ceramic murals, and numerous banner, tapestry and

embroidery projects, while others were major public art commissions. The corporate world increasingly became both a client and a sponsor, and organisations like Crafts Councils and some small agencies worked to link craftspeople with these opportunities.

Artists and craftspeople became more involved in these projects from the early planning stages, so the works could be properly incorporated in the building rather than being a hasty addition at the end. As well as the Crafts Board's Public Art Program of funding for seeding grants, some state governments, notably in Tasmania and South Australia, and later in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, also devised supportive schemes. Early in the eighties Tasmania endorsed the long-hoped-for legislation that allocated 1 per cent of costs (with a limit of $10,000) associated with constructing new public buildings towards the commissioning of artworks; South Australia developed a vigorous program that 'seeded' projects from a special public art budget, and employed many craftspeople in the innovative development of large individual and collaborative projects; and Victoria supported many public projects through its community arts schemes and its public art program.[474]

Interior designers started to come to trade fairs and Craft Expos to find people whose work could be commissioned. Both individuals, and groups like Biltmoderne and Urban Works in Melbourne, and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative, became increasingly competent at presenting themselves to clients, and ensuring that projects could be successfully completed. In 1987 Melbourne interior designer Janne Faulkner said:

> I wish that students were taught to work with more emphasis on the marketplace. They should be looking at making a good kitchen table for $120 but I go to places and they are making a pink vinyl love seat you can't even sit on.[475]

As well as furniture designer-makers, a number of others moved away from gallery exhibitions almost entirely, as their commissions took them more consistently into 'real' environments, and consequently out of the promotional media that would include them in any art world narrative. By the 1980s, for example, an increasing number of small, stained-glass design businesses were working full-time on commissioned work, carving out their own sections of a market that included church, secular and domestic commissions. Some institutions like the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, and smaller weaving enterprises, such as Liz Nettleton's Tapestry Studios of Australia, in Melbourne, worked almost entirely on commissioned works. The surf fashion company, Mambo, in Sydney, consistently commissioned

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[474]See *Artlink* 9 2 1989; Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board *Arts Report* 1989; *Public Art, Public Space* NSW Ministry for the Arts 1989; *Art for Public Places* Department for the Arts and Cultural Heritage, Arts Program Division, Adelaide 1991

[475]Janne Faulkner *Craft Australia* 1987/1 28

artists and craftspeople like Bruce Goold, Reg Mombasa and Gerry Wedd to design for its screenprinted surf-wear and furnishing fabrics.

Undertaking major commissions required a great many more skills than simply making the work, and while some had successfully and consistently worked in this way for some time, most craftspeople and architects entered this decade relatively inexperienced in such collaborations. By the nineties, however, many craftspeople had acquired a great deal of experience not only in making large works for public places or designing and making for corporate gifts and trophies, but also in planning, negotiating, interpreting needs and ideas, and carrying a project through. Some craftspeople, like glass artist Meza Rijsdijk, in Sydney, found that the term 'small business person' best described what they did. She made unique art works, used the same processes to make production works, designed and made trophies and light fittings for limited niche production and also carried out large scale commissioned sculptural works, most significantly in 1996-97 for ships in a Scandinavian shipping line.

The most influential example and training ground for commissions in the 1980s was the way in which the architects for the design and construction of the new Parliament House between 1982 and 1988 believed that art and craft works should be incorporated in the building. This project had not only the completion of the building with all its artworks inside it as its goal, but also the long-term professional effect of the new working relationships and practices that were entered into. It affected not only the makers, but also the 150 or so young architects who left the project experienced in, and presumably committed to, similar associations. Within the firm Mitchell, Giurgola and Thorp Architects, partners Romaldo Giurgola and Pamille Berg provided both the philosophical base for the incorporation of artworks within the building, as well as much of the practical method for their selection, commissioning, fabrication and installation.[476]

Giurgola and Berg set about finding people - artists, designers, craftspeople, small businesses and artisans - who could realise some of their ambitions for the project through the 80 commissions that were given to artists and craftspeople, and the acquisition of almost 3000 works. As many of the people eventually selected had never before been asked to produce work of the scale and perhaps importance of these projects, the particular flair of Giurgola and Berg was the way in which they could recognise potential,

[476]They worked with the Parliament House Construction Authority and curator Katrina Rumley, as well as with the authority's national art advisory committee. This working group was responsible for all aspects of the nearly all the commissions and acquisitions of artworks for the rotating collection of the building, with a total budget of $13 million by 1988. See also Haig Beck (ed) *Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation* (1988); see also *Craft Australia* 1987/3 63

extract ingenuity and initiative from those commissioned, and set up connections between designers and makers in rewarding partnerships.[477]

Many makers found that professional activity through commissions largely took them away from galleries. For many the contact and challenge of working with a client was fulfilling, carrying its own integrity through seeking mutual agreement on interpretation of needs. Others still believed that this 'compromised' their identity as artists. New skills were needed to run an art-based practice as a small business, and arts accountancy practices developed, as well as small business advisory groups focusing on the arts.

Finally, the growing interest shown by architects and developers in faithfully restoring old buildings not only caused searches for earlier plans and drawings, but also for people with skills in almost-lost areas. Those who could blow glass for large lamps, cast or shape metal, work with wood or marble, or recall even more obscure skills and processes began to be sought after. A number of practitioners, like glass-artist Brian Hirst in Sydney, entered into important collaborative exercises with restoration architects, often finding associated work for others in the projects they were commissioned to do.

Exhibitions like Collaborative Designs - Working Together in Architecture, in Melbourne in 1988, and seminars like Creative City in Melbourne in 1988 and Urban Thresholds in Perth in 1989, were characteristic of events that encouraged thinking along these lines.

Changing work practices

The social, theoretical and institutional changes that took place, and the shifting of values in art, crafts and design practice that accompanied them, were reflected in the different ways in which craftspeople (by the 1990s more often called makers, designer-makers, or artists, depending on how they positioned themselves) chose to work, or to value their work. There remained a strong view that the pursuit of art ideals was the prime target to aim for, but there was increasing evidence that a broader view was not only being accepted, but preferred.

Specialisation

Despite the broadening of approach through multi-craft organisations, and the inclusion of crafts courses in the wider frameworks of art schools, one significant aspect of professional practice in the 1980s was the further development of media specialisation. This was significant as, in

[477] Artists and craftspeople were involved from the very early stages of architectural planning, and most of these people successfully entered not only into collaborative design, but also into employment and contracting arrangements that greatly extended their professional capacities.

contradiction, between and even within, media practices, possibilities were seen as opening up rather than narrowing, and people celebrated 'crossing boundaries'.

It was becoming more apparent that craftspeople were reasserting their specific identities within their own traditions. Not only did they need wider references, broader skills and contact with other artforms and ideas, but they also reinforced specific connections with their specialist fields. From the late 1970s new specialist organisations formed for the support and development of, for example, jewellery and metalsmithing, glass, quiltmaking, textiles and musical-instrument-making, and remained very active into the 1990s.

The 1980s were significant for the numbers of national specialist conferences that were held - especially in ceramics, glass, textiles, jewellery and metalwork - in which hundreds of participants enrolled, and to which international and national speakers were invited. Branches of specialist organisations formed, specialist national newsletters were published, and for most national organisations a biennially rotating national administration round the states shared the workload for major events such as conferences and related exhibitions.[478] Often art school combined with specialist organisations to host these events; sometimes the schools hosted their own seminrs and symposia.

It was specialist organisations, and the events that took place around them, that drew together the diverse elements of each area and began to force a more philosophical assessment of the purpose of 'making' in that area and its relationship to a wider society. Established associations, like potters societies and handspinning and weaving guilds, as well as the new glass, and jewellery and metalsmithing organisations in particular, started to discuss broader social and cultural questions in relation to their field, alongside technical and practical concerns.[479]

The role of technology

An associated issue was the question of whether technology was something the crafts should adopt or reject. Much of the postwar crafts ethos had been founded on the notion of the handmade, the natural, and a concern for materials, which was associated with a rejection of the mass produced, the anonymous and the artificial.

But as early as 1922, in response to the Bauhaus message to 'return to the crafts', designer/critic Adolf Behne provided a response that was still pertinent:

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[478]Even groups like leatherworkers, woodworkers and quiltmakers that had some state bodies, but no national organisation, organised national conferences.

[479]Refer Grace Cochrane, T*he Crafts Movement in Australia* (1992) Chapter 8 for a more detailed account, and for a summary of conferences.

> Craftsmanship has become a catchword. Today we have ascribed everything positive to the word craftsmanship, everything negative to technology. But...craftsmanship is not the good angel, nor is technology the evil demon of art and culture...Can one really dispute the fact that there are innumerable handcrafted products which are loveless, indifferent, banal and superficial? Is there not mechanical work in handiwork, and can one maintain that work aided by technology cannot be exceptionally inspired and conscientious? If the difference between craft and technology is not a simple qualitative one...what is the actual difference?[480]

In Australia, contact over many decades with developing countries through the World Crafts Council had shown that many underdeveloped countries, however romantic their situation might seem, would gladly have adopted any technology - starting with electricity - that would make their production more streamlined and economic.

In 1984 design writer John Thackara visited Australia to look at the role played by design in tackling the economic problems of developing industry in a country with a small population, a large land mass and competitive neighbours. He interviewed the federal minister of science and technology, Barry Jones, and commented:

> 'In many ways Australia has become an industrial museum', Jones says; 'many of our factories are working models of the craft skills of the 'fifties. Where Japan has an industrial revolution every ten years, Australia's "turn-around" time has been 30-50 years.' But are all such skills outdated? Australian industry cannot compete on price; volume production is not its strength. But...the outdated skills dismissed by Jones and the lively crafts sector date back to the fifties, when a new generation of European immigrants arrived. And it is to the 'fifties that Australia's design community today looks with interest - not just for nostalgia, but for an era in which product *quality* was higher than today.[481]

A special art and technology issue of the journal, *Artlink*, in 1987, identified a large number of craftspeople using some of the new technologies available at the time. Here jeweller and designer Lyn Tune summarised her view of the reasons for some craftspeople adopting new technology without losing integrity as makers, and in fact possibly enhancing it:

> Notions of the unique object...lifestyle...and the value of the handmade...have unfortunately led to many extremes of maintaining the situation of the Middle Ages, shunning any machine, and in tertiary education ignoring information about possible methods of manufacture. The traditional process of making as a means of creative expression is an end in itself and a small market will always exist for its products...but is not the only area of practice which is valid. An object which has been well-designed, makes use of the quality of

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[480]Adolf Behne *Art, Handicraft. Technology* (Kunst, Handwerk, Technik) first published 1922, cited in Frayling and Snowdon, in John Houston *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* op cit (1988) 133

[481]John Thackara *Design* 424 (UK) April 1984 38-47

> the materials and fills a need in the community is of no less value than one which is available to only one person...We now have to compete with our products in an arena where innovation and design are the trade, and new technology is the currency. We cannot do this very successfully unless we have some designers and innovators...Countries like Scandinavia and Italy which had continued to involve craftspeople and designers in their industries, evolved a manufacturing ethic based on the premise that design is a cultural activity.[482]

In 1989 the Australian Network for Art and Technology in Adelaide, was one of the first to teach three-dimensional computer-aided design (3D-CAD), which could be linked to computer-aided manufacture (CAM).[483] In the following years a number of crafts designers enrolled in courses here, and elsewhere, to learn how to design their work in this way. Art and design schools also recognised the value of computer-aided design and manufacture, and saw that it would be necessary to introduce these systems to their courses. As the technology became more accessible they were quick to develop centres that enabled students to experiment with, and become proficient in both computer-based art, and also computer-aided design and manufacture.

Jill Smith was notable as one who used computer aided design to enable her to carry out commissions to apply designs to ceramic wares for Australian Fine China in Perth, and Rob Knottenbelt used new high speed water jets to cut plate glass. Jewellers, metalsmiths and woodworkers increasingly linked their work through computer aided design to laser-cutting technology. In the nineties metalworker Robert Foster, in Fink Design, was, as far as he knew, the first person to use American military-developed plastic explosives for decorative purposes: he used this technology to force metal into a mould for making anodised aluminium vases.

The new technologies were liberating to those who chose to address them. Pointing out that the Industrial Revolution was over and that industrialism was on its knees, Peter Timms asked in 1990 why many craftspeople were still trying to come to terms with them:

> Electronic technologies are now tending to eliminate the nexus between mass production and endless repetition and to bring industrial practice closer to the nineteenth-century ideals of handcraft...which allow for more dispersed forms of production.[484]

Lyn Tune's view was similar: 'Perhaps we can now look again at our relationship with objects', she suggested:

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[482]Lyn Tune 'Hands and heads: a survey of new production technology' *Artlink: Art and Technology* vol 7 nos 2&3 1987 78

[483]See Richard Brecknock *SA Crafts* 2/89

[484]Peter Timms 'An Evolutionary Backwater: Craft, Bassett Hounds and Oblivion' *Craft Victoria* Dec/Jan 1990-91 4

> The importance of an article is not just that it is handmade but that it comes from a creative thought process that utilises the qualities of the materials, that it reflects the culture where it was developed and that it is innovative in its design, both physically in how well it works for its purpose, but also in its aesthetic. I feel that a new technology contains the possibility of our being able to design and manufacture within a brief closely aligned with the ethic of craft, and even make a living.[485]

By 1997, not only were some craftspeople exploring computer-aided design and manufacturing, but most were now individually or collectively developing web-sites to promote their work, and using the internet to carry out research, communicate with colleagues and send designs on line for manufacture elsewhere.

Technologies, often described as extensions of the hand, could be tools that complemented the underlying values of the handmade. They inevitably contributed, along with other social and institutional changes, to the development of different work practices.

Attitudes to production

Earlier attitudes and practices involving studio production and exhibition work of functional forms were maintained by many at an increasingly accomplished level, reaching an audience and market that continued to sustain them. Many, like potters Col Levy, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and Milton Moon, and glass artist Klaus Moje *(see Plate 15: before page 145)*, were practitioners who had been working since the 1960s, and younger people continued to set up similar practices. Some of the work produced in this way was very highly regarded by peers and started to fetch high prices for commissions and from collectors.[486]

Within this framework, a number of craftspeople developed practices that centred on the production of unique objects, sometimes functional, and sometimes in sculptural forms. But sometimes the production of unique objects that required teamwork, as in glassblowing, posed problems for collectors and even other craftspeople, who believed that a work had to be made by the artist's own hands in order to be 'original' and therefore a work of art. A key example is the work of American glass artist, Dale Chihuly, who works with teams of up to 20 people to make the huge blown, vessel-oriented works for which he is famous. As Chihuly now only designs and oversees the pieces (he likens himself to a film director) his works were at first criticised (by glassworkers as well as collectors) for not being 'original',

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[485]Lyn Tune, op cit (1987); see also *Artlink: Focus on Design* vol 9/4 1989-90; see also Jane Gilmore and Ted Hopkins *Our Own Future* (1989)

[486]By the late 1980s some of the dealers and art auctioneers, like Christie's, Lawson's and Sotheby's in Australia, were becoming interested in work from the 1940s, and much of that which had been collected started appearing in auction houses as collectors moved to smaller houses, or died.

Plate 17: Liz Williamson

(see page 183) *Land folds* (detail) handwoven in wool, wool blend, wool lycra, copper wire, nylon monofilament and gold threads, and (right) *Tear* (detail), cotton and polyester threads, both made in Sydney in 1993 and 1996. (40 x 165 and 40 x 160cm)

While the weavers of the immediate post-war years were most interested in working with the technique and design of weaving fine cloth, Liz Williamson (b.1946), working in the nineties, has benefitted from the freedom of expression explored in the 1970s by those who sought to free weaving from the loom. She is a loom weaver who makes functional shawls and wraps, but is deeply interested in exploring meanings through colour, through cloth structures and through the real and metaphoric functions of cloth and coverings. Drawing on techniques as varied as African strip cloth weaving traditions and domestic processes like darning and patching worn textiles, as well as deliberately using shrinking processes along with odd fibres, she makes seductive and challenging woven statements. In works like *Surface* she is often dealing with the construction of landforms as well as of weaving, and in ideas of 'covering'.

especially as he signs them. This team approach is the one used traditionally by the Murano glass factories which are Chihuly's model, and the model, now, on a smaller scale, for most contemporary glass blowers in Australia. The independent one-person glass studio as an ideal was an invention of the post-war American crafts movement and the influence of the art world that placed value on the expression of the artist as an individual.

During the 1980s there was a re-evaluation of designing and making for multiple production and a different marketplace. Craftspeople working in, for example, furniture design and glass and ceramic production, were able to find places in 'niche markets' because of the flexibility with which, compared with larger industries, they could develop custom-made 'designed' items in small production runs. They were able to use new technologies alongside handskills to produce unique or small-run items that retained a personal, or handmade, aesthetic - and that did not necessarily compromise their identity as individual designer-makers or 'artists'. Many people, like potter Bronwyn Kemp, weaver Liz Williamson *(see Plate 17: previous page)*, metal worker Robert Foster and glass artists Brian Hirst and Warren Langley, worked across both art and semi-industrial production, sometimes to the extent of maintaining different labels or companies.[487] Catherine Truman, for example, designed and made production items of jewellery with her colleagues in the Gray Street jewellery workshop in Adelaide, but also took on large public art commissions as well as maintaining a personal practice centred on carving small wooden objects that were metaphors for personal and social issues. *(see Plate 2: before page 1)* Designer Gerry Wedd successfully crossed jewellery designing and making, ceramic design and production in both large and small scale, and designing printed textiles for streetwear and furnishing. *(see Plate 3: before page 11)*

Designing for small series production did not mean carrying out the whole making process oneself; the notion of the craftsperson as designer-maker came to mean someone who would design and then, perhaps, contract aspects of the work either to an assistant or to an outside specialist business. This led in some instances to designing multiple, interchangeable, basic components for varying production work. Some potters had already been making interchangeable components for production, and furniture-makers, jewellers and clothing-makers now also 'contracted out' part of the production process.[488] Jenny Kee, for example, had employed contract hand-knitters for her distinctive 'art-clothing' from the early 1970s *(see Plate 25: before page 201)*.

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[487]For example, glass artist Warren Langley signs his one off works with his name, while also running a business making glass architectural blocks and tiles as 'Ozone'; metal worker Robert Foster similarly operates as 'Fink Design'.

[488]Early examples include those making knitted clothing, like Jenny Kee, Lincz at the Jam Factory, Jenni Dudley and others, who contracted out knitting and sewing. In jewellery, Margaret Kirkwood set up an arrangement with a casting business; Larsen and Lewers sent production work out to be anodised, and Lyn Tune used a local company for laser

Plate 18: Carlier Makigawa
(see page 184) Brooch, 925 sterling silver and monel, made in Melbourne in 1991. (5 x 13cm approx)

Carlier Makigawa (b.1952) combines her strong interest in the qualities of materials and the processes of working with them, with a clear sense of their presentation. Many of her works refer to a psychological and physical enclosure of space. While a student she saw a travelling exhibition of Japanese packaging, and in 1984, enclosing river stones in box-frames, said it 'has always had an impact on me, the subtle and simple use of natural material that highlights the Japanese aesthetic...I have always been a collector of natural objects...and I enjoy creating a special environment for them or by them.' Now using a range of traditional and new metals for their colour as well as their manipulability, she also determines how the works should be worn (pendants should be worn at the level of the belly button.)
Makigawa is also one of the many contemporary jewellers who, in being aware of the special relationship of jewellery to the body, have used photography with theatrical effect to display their work.

Les Blakebrough and Penny Smith, in Tasmania, both spent some time researching in Scandinavian and British ceramic factories in the 1990s, and then set up a ceramic production unit at the University of Tasmania's Centre for the Arts whose purpose was to design for semi-industrial production. This was one of a number of similar small enterprises that reflected a major shift from the philosophy that had rejected these processes in the 1960s.

Contracting out also applied to those undertaking major commissions. Peter Travis, for example, employed modelmakers to construct the maquettes of buildings into which he was placing aerial textile sculpture and sent work out for sewing and dyeing. Many aspects of the making of rugs and furniture and other commissions for the New Parliament House between 1982 and 1988 were contracted out by the designer-makers and by the architects, and this reinforced and stimulated an already discernable pattern of working.

It was not, however, possible for everyone to set up the individual studios they needed. While several attempts had been made in the 1970s to establish co-operatives or group workshops, shared studios like those of the jewellers in the Gray Street Workshops in Adelaide, the metalsmiths at EGS (Edgoose, Guest and Schlabowsky) studio in Melbourne and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative in Hobart, became increasingly common in the 1980s as craftspeople and designer-makers grouped together to share resources and equipment, and sometimes to share commissions.[489]

In the early 1990s some designers, like Marc Newson *(see Plate 19: next page)* and Susan Cohn, were entering into manufacturing arrangements with overseas companies. Susan Cohn's *Cohn-cave* bowl of perforated aluminium was taken up by the Italian company, Alessi. Newson increasingly worked directly on-line through the internet with manufacturers in Australia, France and Japan to put his product design, furniture and lighting into production.

The main difference in work practice at this time seemed to be that, whereas production work in the past had generally taken second place to exhibition work, these makers saw production for new markets other than galleries as a legitimate and exciting practice. Craftspeople also became much more professional about the presentation of their work. The days of wrapping things in newspaper were over: labels, swing-tags, packaging and promotional leaflets, as well as detailed biographical and photographic documentation became essential *(see for example, Plate 18: previous page),*

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cutting acrylic for light fittings. Jan Lewis (previously Westrup) employed production assistants for table and gardenware ceramic production, and Helmut Lueckenhausen, Marc Newson, Leslie John Wright and others entered into arrangements for aspects of their furniture to be constructed by outside industries.

[489]Other examples of shared workshops included the Inner City Clayworkers (Sydney); the jewellery and silversmithing studios Workshop 3000 (Melbourne) and Ipso Facto (Sydney); the Glass Artists Gallery and Turkey Works in Sydney; Whitehall Industries in Melbourne; and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative.

Plate 19: Marc Newson
(see page 184) *Embryo Chair* designed by Marc Newson, commissioned by the Powerhouse Museum, and made in neoprene, polyurethane and steel by DeDeCe in Sydney in 1988. (80 x 70 x 77cm)

Marc Newson (b.1963) reflects a particular kind of possibility for contemporary designer-makers. Trained in the early 1980s as a jeweller and sculptor rather than a designer, he continued to value making his own prototypes until the mid-1990s. 'I developed a passion for technique, for geometry and for the possible rapport between art, science and technology.' The *Embryo* chair, based on his trademark three-dimensional figure-eight shape, is now made in small series by the Japanese company Idée. Newson's sources of ideas have ranged from furniture in classical paintings to forms suggested by the possibilities of high-tech materials and aeronautical technology, all with a concern for immaculate crafted finish.

Newson is now based in London but designs objects and building interiors on-line and communicates through internet to manufacturers and distributors world-wide. 'I still conceive on paper,' he says, 'but with the computer I can totally prepare an object for tooling without having to create models...But after ten years in the trade, I've honed my knowledge enough to know what's going to work and what's not.'
Marc Newson in Stephen Todd, 'Liquid Geometry' *Monument* 20 1997 30-43

and the most effective promotion was through the innovative and well-designed pages of life-style magazines.

Reviewing crafts ideals

Questions of value

Such significant changes (in the perceptions that practitioners held of their own identity; in the direction and infrastructure of arts education and funding; in the expectations of audiences and markets; in the opportunities provided by new technologies; and through the challenges posed by cultural theories) gave craftspeople an opportunity to review some of the specific values to do with the crafts that had been controversial in relation to fine art. These included - alongside and often part of their expression of ideas - values associated with enjoyment of working with materials, the development of skill, an understanding of process, the roles of decoration and function and the consideration of a market.

From the time of the Crafts Enquiry survey in the early 1970s the age profile of professional craftspeople had been changing: by the mid-eighties, five to ten years of graduates from even the new courses had now entered the field. These younger people had had different and wider cultural associations throughout their training, and were also aware of a tightened economy and the need to find markets if they were going to keep working. Most had not been part of the fights for funding, equality of representation or education, and most certainly had little experience of the idealism of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Theirs was a fairly pragmatic view of the world, but in common with their predecessors they sought self-directed expressive activity or employment, and an enjoyment of materials, processes and purpose.

A series of short articles written by Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon under the general title 'Perspectives on Craft', and published in the British journal *Craft* in 1982, offered some of the earliest published provocative ideas to challenge art ideals. They surveyed a number of craftspeople in England at the time, and summarised their findings under the topics (equally pertinent in Australia) of: 'The Myth of the Happy Artisan', 'Crafts: With or Without Art', 'Skill: a Word to Start an Argument', 'Crafts in the Market-Place', and 'Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be'. They grouped the respondents to their survey into three areas that they suggested represented different traditions up to that time: Arts and Crafts (Cotswold version), Council of Industrial Design (Haymarket version) and Craftsman's Art (South Kensington version) - and elsewhere, also added the Oriental Mystic (Cornish version).

Frayling and Snowdon concluded that although these groups might differ in the words they use: '("reason versus feelings", "theory which grows out of good practice", "theory versus practice")...all are agreed that craft activity

represents a type of knowledge the effectiveness of which can be demonstrated rather than articulated in a verbal way:

> The distinction between craft and other types of knowledge is not one between theory (or reason) and practice (or feeling) - and it may well be disastrous to suggest it is. The distinction is between two ways of knowing. But if one is locked up in a black box and labelled 'experience', then it is in constant danger of not being counted as knowledge at all.

Some attempts had been made to penetrate this black box, they suggested:

> ...through research into how children can best develop the intelligence of feeling; through the sociology of 'doing craft (as opposed to the sociology of craftspeople); through the history of how craft traditions are passed on; through the psychology of visual perception and the science of why materials behave as they do; and through an understanding of what the Victorians called the 'grammar of ornament'.[490]

Furthermore, they suggested that a second issue was 'the widespread temptation to find substitutes for the analysis of craft knowledge in a series of attitudes and postures which are based on the mythology of craft - to put the black box on a pedestal and call it magic. Could it be,' they asked, 'that these attitudes, in the 1980s, sustain the makers, their market, and indeed the whole crafts revival?' Frayling and Snowdon concluded that:

> ...while most accounts of craftsmanship depend for their support on sentimentality and conservatism and while most discussions of craft knowledge remain at the level of hippie folk-wisdom, proper assessment of craft and its contemporary value and significance will forever remain obscured.[491]

Frayling and Snowdon were writing from a British perspective: one that was shaped by the experience of the Arts and Crafts movement, a history of legislation for good taste in the 1940s, a direct experience of industrialisation and a long history of British art and design education. Without such direct industrial contradictions, and despite its inheritance of British crafts ideals, Australia, by contrast, was equally aligned at this stage to the United States and its preoccupations with the personal expression of an individual through art. Personal expression, and the assertion of the artist as an individual, was associated with the belief that art, and therefore art-craft, was to do with idea rather than utility.

Because of the prolific scale of publication and more affluent marketplace in the United States, the kind of objects made there and the claims that were made for them were increasingly influential in Australia. At the Philbrook Museum of Art in the United States in 1987, curators Marcia and Tom Manhart titled an important exhibition, The Eloquent Object: American Art

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[490]Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon 'Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be' in John Houston *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* (1988) 131

[491]Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon ibid (1988) 132

in Craft Media Since 1945'. The American catalogue essayists still appeared to hold a continuing commitment to the pursuit of with 'craft-as-art' ideals, and revealed continuing difficulty in dealing with issues of materials, functions and quality. John Perrault had claimed, for example: 'Crafts and fine art are one...it is only quality that makes a difference. There is no such thing as a good craft object, for a good craft object is an art object.' But querying even the term 'art in craft media', reviewer Tony Chastain-Chapman asked: 'Can it be...that this is not a bold affirmation but rather an apology for the objects in their show not being made of the right materials?' However, while criticising the positions of the curators, Chastain-Chapman went on to reveal his own prejudice, claiming as fact:

> ...that there are commonsense distinctions between art and craft. Much of what is shown...is clearly art (sculpture for the most part) rather than craft because of its lack of utility...and because its creators are clearly artists...whose work is distinguished from that of other artists by unique qualities arising out of the exercise of their individual imaginations.[492]

For Australians, skill and materials were certainly issues, as had been demonstrated by the art world's rejection of them in the 1970s, an attitude that had lingered into the 1980s. But perhaps an equal issue was 'function', or in fact, 'non-function', because it was non-functional work that so many people had aspired to: in the form of what they called 'personal work', 'conceptual work', 'exhibition work', 'experimental work', 'real work', 'sculptural work', 'one off pieces' and even 'spiritual work', despite that fact that functional work could also be personal, real, experimental, one-off and meaningful.[493] People tended to sign non-functional works (as well as their functional exhibition pieces), but not always their production or commissioned work. Non-functional work was seen to give greater status as an artist, even over and above the production of functional exhibition pieces.

'Function' had been most generally discussed in terms of utility, implying a practical use for something: whether it worked or not.[494] But it became clear to craftspeople in the 1980s, that 'function' could mean much more than this: art works could function as symbols of status and value. John Berger, for example, in discussing eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings of property and possessions, explained that they represented what the owner of the painting was able to own: these works functioned as a symbolic measure of the owner's success.[495] In the same way, contemporary works acquired by

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[492]Tony Chastain-Chapman 'Aspiring to History' review of *The Eloquent Object: the Evolution of American Art in Craft Media* in *American Craft* Apl/May 1988 31-32, also citing John Perrault.

[493]A point of view reinforced by Elizabeth McClure, paper to Ausglass conference, Sydney 1991

[494]Functional ideals discredited an object if it did not 'work'. What craftspeople had called 'criticism' had often been a measurement against functional expectations: teapots, for example, had to submit to the 'pour test'.

[495]John Berger *Ways of Seeing* (1971) Chapter 5

museums and collectors functioned both to enhance the status of both the collector and collection, and the artist. The 'neutral' context of a gallery, designed to remove works from a 'function', in fact functioned as an agreed site that determined the significance of the work.

While art once 'functioned' within groups that shared a common symbolic order, a circumstance that still occurred in some societies *(see for example, basket-weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie, Plate 20: following page)*,[496] contemporary Western artists no longer worked in such confined frameworks: following current directions, they worked more independently with more personal symbolic references drawn from a wide range of sources. However, visual artists who may have believed that as individuals they controlled the meaning of their work - beyond function - were in reality still working within a distinct art world framework that had a history of attitudes and expectations of what art was believed to be, what an artist was and how both were expected to function.[497] In turn, artists also had their own expectations of what they wanted from the (current) art world and the way it should function for them.

There was, after all, a shared social order: art functioned to provide both symbolic meaning for maker and viewer and economic value as income or investment.

In 1988 the Crafts Council of Australia sought to provide a forum where the social context of the crafts could be discussed.[498] The intent was to draw this issue to the attention of both craftspeople and the wider art world in order to place equal cultural value on the crafts. But sociologist Janet Wolff, a speaker at the conference, believed that the event as a whole had failed to take up a social-historical perspective on the crafts. Speakers had tended to use the 'social' as a backdrop to descriptive detail, or had related their work to their experience and claimed that that made it 'social'. It was still possible, she pointed out, 'to avoid any analysis of the practices of craft-making in

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[496]The body and ground paintings of Aboriginal Australians, and the jewellery, textiles, and carved and modelled figures of the tribal peoples of Africa, South America and Asia, their usually abstracted forms often labelled primitive or naïve, succeed because the makers know their subjects so well. They share a spiritual and symbolic content of the objects with their group, and they also fully understand the materials and the processes of working with them.

[497]Robert Hughes 'Art and Money' in *Nothing if Not Critical* (1987) 396. Hughes suggested that art collecting, for example, could be described to function as an aspect of corporate investment, a 'creation of confidence' that might be '*the* cultural artifact of the last half of the twentieth century.' He identified the beginning of this phenomenon with the appearance of the *Times-Sotheby Art Indexes* around 1966 that gave reports and graphs from auction houses on the statistics of movements in art prices with 'the trustworthy look of the *Times* financial page'.

[498]This took place in Sydney in 1988 as the World Crafts Council's International Conference, *The Social Context of the Crafts and of Making*.

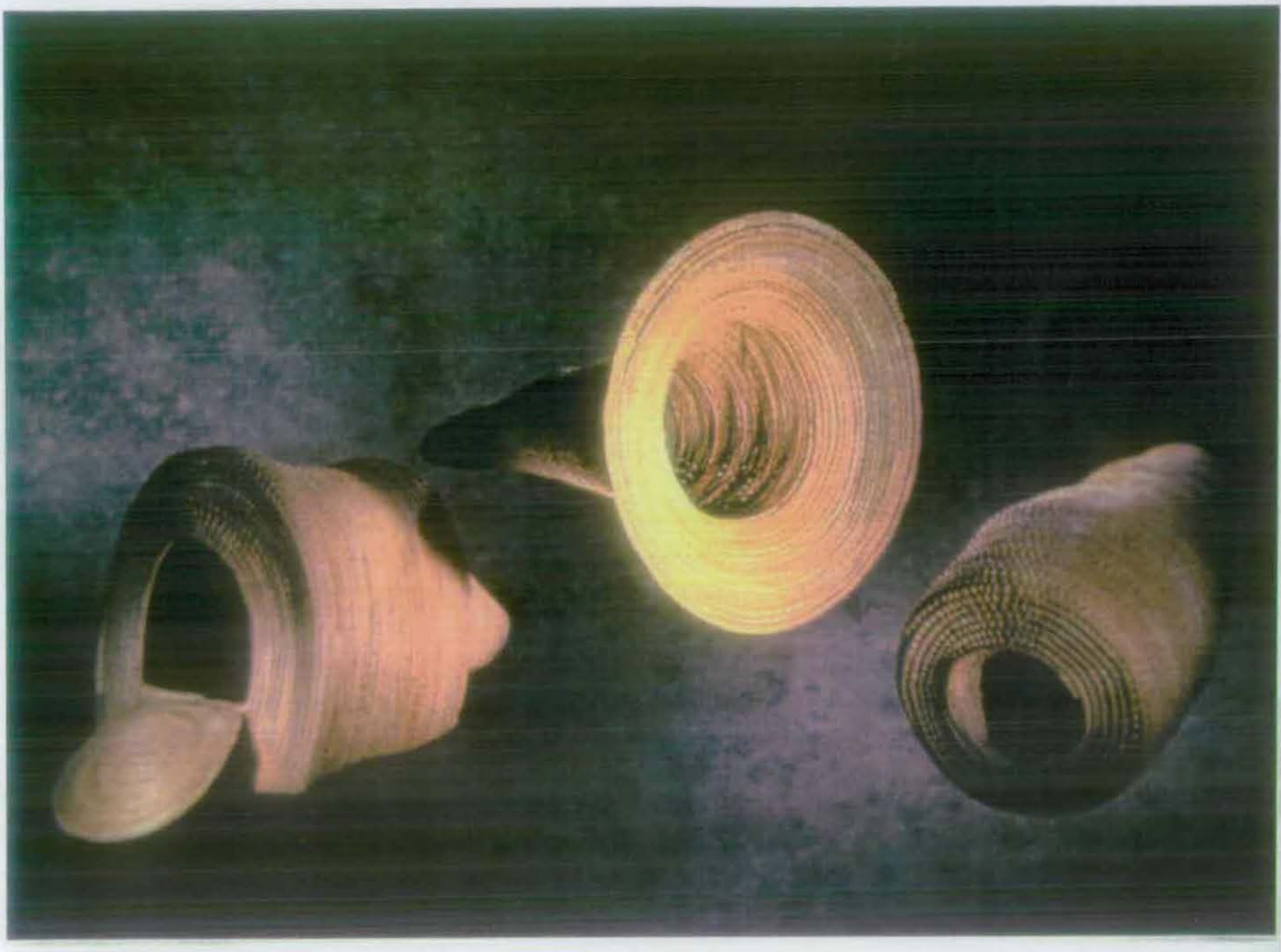

Plate 20: Yvonne Koolmatrie
(see page 188) *Yabbie trap*, *eel trap* and *fish trap*, woven in sedge rush (lepidosperma canesens) by Ngarrindjeri artist Yvonne Koolmatrie, lower Murray River region, South Australia 1993. (45 x 46 x 76, 57 x 96, 38 x 88cm)

Yvonne Koolmatrie (b.1945) has been involved in the revival of this coil-bundle and loop-stitched process, traditional amongst her people in the lower Murray River area of South Australia. As well as functional forms like these, she also makes other items like aeroplanes and turtles. This process was taken by missionaries to other parts of Australia like Arnhemland, where local Aboriginal people have developed their own styles with local materials. The spectacular forms of these utiliarian object are viewed as sculpture by the art world, and Koolmatrie's fish-traps were included in the Venice Biennale in 1997.

terms of the social relations in which they occur, the social values that they represent, and social meanings which they produce and maintain.'[499]

Wolff proposed that it was 'less the question of social context that is at issue than the question of *social production*'. The question of whether craft is art, or what differentiates the two:

...simply cannot be answered in intrinsic terms - in terms of the particular characteristics of works of art or craft, of whether or not an object is functional, or of whether or not production is individual or sequential...nor can simple legislation remove the division.

Furthermore, pointing out that the artist/craftsperson is a social being, and that art is always collective action, she suggested that the second issue of handicraft versus design for industry, was also defused by a social-historical perspective:

> For it is immediately clear that the implicit notion of 'pure creativity,' somehow contaminated by losing control over the entire process, was always a myth...although there can be more or less control over the production process, the stark opposition of individual creativity/autonomy and compromised collaboration is quite misconceived.'[500]

'What is it that we seek so desperately in this art-craft marriage?' asked writer and gallery director Garth Clarke in the United States in 1987, looking at the 'cultural orphans' who denied the crafts as their parent, but where the fine arts, in turn, denied paternity. He proposed that it was not aesthetic freedom that people sought, because 'that is tied to the human spirit and not to labels and definitions', but to a political goal: to pursuit of wealth and power. He saw a the future in reviewing crafts practice within the *applied*, rather than the *fine* arts, saying:

> ...our reward will be the achievement will be the achievement of an honest context and a reconnection with the umbilical cords of the past. Our contribution to the applied arts will be to bring it in to the present and give it a new and dynamic role in the contemporary cultural arena.[501]

In 1990 Jenny Zimmer also concluded that in their pursuit of art ideals the crafts had, in the end, thrown the baby out with the bathwater. 'The '80s project of exploding or blurring the art/craft definition now seems futile, illogical and gratuitous,' she said:

> Futile because it is impossible to do so while one of the two terms is so firmly entrenched and value-laden; illogical, because to remove the distinction under current conditions may lead to losses on both sides rather than composite gains; and gratuitous because, over the broad span of history,

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[499]Janet Wolff 'Social Context' *Crafts* Sept/Oct 1988 15-16

[500]Janet Wolff ibid (1988)

[501]Garth Clark 'Comment' *American Craft* Dec 1986/Jan 1987 14-15

> good craft always takes its rightful place alongside good art. The museums are full of both.[502]

She argued that because art is the winner everyone wants to be an artist. But, despite the promises to the crafts offered by Postmodernism, she also pointed out that: 'Postmodern theory as currently practised is ill-equipped to serve the crafts, and this has proven detrimental to their identity.' Indeed, she suggested, 'if form, function and decoration, and the media and techniques they entail, seem more prosaic than meaning, it is because modern interpretive theory has fixated on the latter.' She acknowledged that there were perfectly acceptable instances of craftspeople abandoning their interest in opting for ideas-based crafts practice, and that there were are also craftspeople and artists who might fulfil the criteria for both art and craft, or move regularly back and forth between the two:

> But there are some crafts practitioners who simply make high quality, useful, imaginative, ornamental craft objects but demand that they be categorised and criticised under the current definition of art. Their demands seem pretentious and misguided.[503]

In 1987 Peter Dormer reviewed the previous twenty years of jewellery-making. 'Of all the decorative arts in Europe', he said, 'Jewellery has been...the most intelligent, the most reflective and the least historicist...The leaders of the new jewellery movement turned jewellery into an intellectual as well as an intelligent activity.' But he also pointed out that by this time there had been a lot of pretentiousness and that all the more obvious questions about what jewellery is had been asked:

> The contemporary jewellery movement must recognise and overcome its current weakness of having forgotten the consumer...Too many...have forgotten that their role is also...to serve a public as well as making their names in the tiny quasi art world of avant-garde jewellery.

Reminding us the greatest recent revolution in wearables had come from the Swatch watch and the Sony Walkman, he observed that:

> The lesson here is that where a thing is both functional and genuinely entertaining, it will cross boundaries and break conventions...It seems strange that the greatest progress in innovative wearable objects is coming not from jewellery but from product designers.[504]

Speaking about jewellery, but also providing a framework that could be applied to others, he saw the roles for the modern jeweller as to: create objects that people want to wear for sheer pleasure; to have a role in applying their ideas to the design of consumable products; to continue to break new ground, recognising the challenge of new technologies; and also to be an

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[502]Jenny Zimmer 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater' *The Sydney Review* October 1990 10-11

[503] Jenny Zimmer ibid (1990)

[504]Peter Dormer 'What is the Future for Contemporary Jewellery?' *Lemel* Dec 1987 3-4

artist. However, he cautioned: 'The word artist is over-used and it should be employed rarely and only for the handful of individuals who are able to create metaphors that give us a new way of seeing the world.'[505]

Nonetheless, even though these issues were increasingly discussed, prejudice about the superiority of 'art' remained.

In reviewing the exhibition, Symmetry, in 1995, which juxtaposed selected crafts practices with kindred trades: 'the first theorised craft exhibition, if you like', Anne Brennan cited a discussion with a painter who expressed the view that 'it was inappropriate to fund practice which was simply about "making things"...[and] didn't I agree that the most interesting craft was "intellectual" rather than functional?' Brennan wondered where all the writing she and others had been publishing was being read. 'Of course', she observed, it was:

> ...crucial that we perceive these theoretical developments as intended principally for the interest and extension of craftspeople, rather than as a strategy for justifying craft to the critical hierarchies of the visual arts. On the other hand, craft practice is part of a broader visual culture, and as such, one expects that a certain amount of what is written will be received and digested by practitioners in other fields...[506]

This well-funded Australian exhibition was supported in the interests of crafts equity with the visual arts as an example of an intellectualisation of the crafts from their own traditions. However, despite its attempts to realign the crafts with trades rather than art (for example jewellery with dentistry, glass blowing with jazz, carpentry with surgery), the trades were 'curiously absent in the exhibition itself'.[507] The exhibition still took place in art galleries and was viewed by arts audiences, and Anne Brennan believed that it worked best in its documented form to art audiences, rather than through either its display or in the audiences it attracted. Not all the relationships and processes necessary to meet its goals were satisfactorily apparent.

This exhibition was perhaps an example of the crafts world's perceived need to theorise the crafts, usually expressed as the 'need for critical debate'. But Peter Timms argued that while 'no-one could seriously argue against the decoding of works of art', the increasing dominance of tertiary discourse seemed to be 'the result of the low priority given in universities to the direct confrontation with artworks.' He warned that in the pursuit of these particular art ideals, the crafts were in danger of being theory-driven by academics, in the way that many essays in a recent anthology managed 'to discuss quite complex theoretical ideas about craft without once referring to any specific examples of craftwork.' Instead of asking for more, he suggested 'it would be

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[505]Peter Dormer ibid (1987) 3-4

[506]Anne Brennan 'Symmetry' *Object* 4 1994-95 10

[507]Anne Brennan ibid (1994-95) 14

more constructive to ask ourselves what kind of theoretical debate we want, who we want to communicate it with and what we hope to achieve.'[508]

Donald Kuspit, art critic and long-time observer of the crafts in New York, said, of the pursuit of art ideals by the crafts in 1990: 'It seems to me that if craft wants to be taken seriously, and move from artifact to art, it has to be willing to submit to various critical languages that are brought to bear on other arts.'[509]

One could add that, at the same time, and especially if the pursuit of art ideals was not the only pursuit, that the languages of the crafts, applied arts, decorative arts, design and industry also needed to be better understood by critics and reviewers, as well as makers, and included in the discussion.

Questions of quality

Questioning the craft-as-art ideal, and whether and how a work might best be identified as art, craft or design, led to a reassessment of the criteria used to determine how any work might be judged as 'good'. Why, after all, would one question the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, if it did not seem to matter, to a great many people who have discussed what had become known as the 'art-craft debate' for some decades, where the pursuit was leading?

To address the issue of judgement, the 'peer-group' assessment system used by bodies like the Australia Council, and the practice of using changing selection committees for major exhibitions, appointments and events by a number of cultural institutions, were strategies devised to gauge professional opinions about excellence (or quality or significance), at any particular time. As Pru La Motte said in 1986 of the fickleness of the art world, 'Art is what you say it is, and that changes.'[510]

The small group of curators responsible for crafts collections, within the various broader collections of decorative arts, fine arts and social history in state and national institutions, and the increasing number of people interested in developing temporary exhibitions that addressed intellectual aspects of the meaning of the crafts, all contributed to assessments and judgements of worth, significance and quality. Assessment of what was good or significant was determined at that time by their considered opinion and experience.

There were no clear guidelines for measurement. In late 1996, writer, curator and art journal editor Peter Timms was interviewed on this topic, along with a number of other writers, critics and publishers in the arts, on *Arts National* radio.[511] He observed that he believed we all expect to have to work hard to

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[508]Peter Timms 'Yes, But What Kind of Craft Debate?' *Craft Victoria* Dec/Jan 1992-93 3,4

[509]Donald Kuspit interviewed in Matthew Kangas 'Critics Talk Back' *The Crafts Report* Jan 1990

[510]Interview with Pru La Motte 1986

[511]Peter Timms, on *Arts Today* ABC radio with Julie Copeland 30 Nov 1996

understand such things as economics, philosophy or science, and that we should also be equally prepared to work to understand creative works in whatever form. He also pointed out that while our view of what art is, changes, at any time we must also accept that there is both good and bad art. He proposed that in making judgements, while we may or may not be right in our view, the issue is to have a position about it, and to say why one holds that position, and, more importantly, to be prepared to be contradicted, or even be wrong.

This was not just an issue for the visual arts and crafts. In a reply to Victor Margolin, who had 'implied that a preoccupation with "good design" was entirely inappropriate, and had led design history astray', design historian Adrian Forty pointed out in 1993 that 'the whole question of judging quality in design, of discriminating between good and bad design, is essential to the entire activity of design.'

How we determine what makes one design better than another, relies, he said, 'upon being able to make critical judgements about quality. The whole question of how people arrive at these judgements, and the arguments they invoke to support them seem to me to be extremely important subjects.' Like Timms, he suggested that we don't have to accept all points of view, but should not be dismissive of other judgements and rather, be able to talk about areas of disagreement:

> What, though, I do find unhelpful to design is the post-structuralist view that all judgements are as good, or as bad as each other...We should argue about the grounds on which those decisions are made, but we should not fall into the nihilistic trap of thinking that no judgements are worth making.'[512]

Some views on how such judgements could be made had rather regulatory solutions. Reviewing the design exhibition, Taste, in London in 1984, Peter Fuller argued that designers cannot opt out of considering the subjective responses of the marketplace, and discussed through historical examples, the way personal preferences are related to universal aesthetic responses. He claimed that the rupture of uniting social and religious beliefs, or illusions, had opened the way for a taste defined by a market economy, and advocated instead, for a legislated control of taste for design in industry that 'would not be a limitation on aesthetic life so much as a *sine qua non* of its continued survival'.[513]

In relation to making judgements in the crafts, contemporary thought and debate showed that, contrary to influential art ideals that had persisted since the 1970s, issues of function, decoration, skill and enjoyment of materials were important to the crafts, and could also apply to every art practice. They also showed that while we can see that hierarchies of value in art practice are

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[512]Adrian Forty 'Debate' *Journal of Design History* 6 2 1993 131

[513]Peter Fuller 'Taste - You can't opt out' *Design* 423 March 1984 41-42

culturally constructed and reinforced, those that place the fine arts above other visual arts practices, nevertheless prevail.

However, it was evident in both theory and practice that simply being 'non-functional' or 'without skill' or 'working with ideas' did not always make something 'art', let alone 'good art', regardless of what was intended in making it, how it was described or where it was exhibited.

What seemed to be needed was a sense of mutual respect for 'good' works (in both ideas and practical resolution) from a range of starting points that might not only be a painting or sculpture, but also a vessel, a length of cloth, a chair or an item of jewellery.

Case studies: art ideals from crafts traditions

Within the broad scope of crafts practice, where a range of approaches to practice are valid, it is possible in my view for art ideals and crafts traditions to come together successfully.

The following brief case studies[514] demonstrate the ways some craftspeople have, in my opinion, successfully addressed art ideals from different traditions within one particular media-based practice, ceramics - although these particular practitioners would be unlikely to call their work 'art', and would be even more unlikely to call it 'art-craft'. Similar approaches can be found in for example, glass, textiles and jewellery and metalwork.

The four people discussed here have spent many years developing not only their ideas, but also the particular skills they need to carry them out. All have well-researched understandings of the history of ceramics, especially the cultural meanings and technical processes that lie behind their chosen ways of working. And they are all conversant with the issues of education, funding, marketing and theory in the wider art world. Together they present a contemporary expression of many of the issues that have confronted potters over several thousand years, especially the changing relationships between individuals and society, art and industry. However, each one is working from a different starting point within this history. It is interesting not only to trace their individual connections with the past, but also to identify contrasts and links between the intents and practices of the people themselves.

From handcraft traditions

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (born 1935) and Stephen Bowers (born 1952) make hand-thrown, functional vessel forms. Both have a long term interest in

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[514]These studies have been adapted from Grace Cochrane [Ceramics: International and Australian histories, with case studies] in a proposed [untitled] publication for Department of School Education New South Wales Sydney 1998

developing particular forms and decoration, and in consciously placing their work in a space. Yet their work is very different.

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott

In 1954 Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (at that time Gwyn John) was studying for a fine arts degree at the University of Melbourne. She was intrigued by the Chinese and Korean pottery in the National Gallery of Victoria and had read Bernard Leach's *A Potters Book*. Her thesis required her to collect information from significant practising potters in Victoria and New South Wales, including Ivan McMeekin at the Sturt workshops. She was eventually apprenticed to McMeekin for three years and considers him her most important influence: 'he showed me how to look at pots'.[515]

She moved to England and worked with key studio potters of the time, including Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew:

> Here I was witness to the daily commitment to quality, the constant curiosity and change, the personal involvements with the history of the craft and the obsessive reading for deeper insights'.[516]

Many of her experiences in these years are still contributing, years later, to her current work. She said of Hans Coper's modernist work in 1965: 'I walked down ...into a place so still; held, not immediately by the pots themselves, but by a sense that the space between the pots were recognised forms too: negatives.'[517] Later, attracted by the freshness and vigour of traditional woodfired French stonewares, she set up a pottery in rural France, where she worked on refining glazes and woodfiring processes to make more subtle effects in her own work. In the early 1970s she also saw the work of the 'still life' painter Giorgio Morandi:

> I love his searching, obsessive, describing of the common objects that were his subject and measure...His work is substantial, tenuous; disturbing, resolved...It is about essence; the metaphysical expressed through the solidly physical and knowable.[518]

She returned to Australia in 1973, and focused on using Tasmanian clay and glaze materials to make hand thrown wood-fired domestic stonewares with subtle, beautiful surfaces. By the late 1980s, she had:

> ...started to look more closely at how pots, perfectly contained within themselves, sit with each other, changing each other. I was interested to find what could hold the pots together in a bonding that...could only be discovered after the firing when everything came into play: lushness, coolness, colour, weight, line.[519]

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[515]Interview, August 1997

[516]Gwyn Hanssen Pigott 'Autobiographical Notes' *The Studio Potter* 20/ 1 Dec 1991 46

[517]Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1991) 46

[518]Gwyn Hanssen Pigott 'Notes from Netherdale' *Ceramics Art and Perception* 27 1997 79

[519] Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1997)

Plate 21: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott
(see page 196) *Family portrait*, woodfired porcelain, made at Finch Hatton, Queensland, in 1996.

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (b. 1936) makes hand thrown wood-fired domestic stonewares with subtle, beautiful surfaces. In the late 1980s, she 'started to look more closely at how pots, perfectly contained within themselves, sit with each other, changing each other. I was interested to find what could hold the pots together in a bonding that...could only be discovered after the firing when everything came into play: lushness, coolness, colour, weight, line'.

She started to make groupings of pots, calling them 'inseparable', or 'still life' groups. New works are more like families: 'They are rather pale, like memories: matt like frescoes...Beauty, and our response to it, remains a mystery', she said in 1997. 'But it seems to me that, in the alchemy of making, the pot becomes subtly humanised. It is as though a kind of knowing - a history of understanding, and a sort of longing is translated, through care and consideration, and an intimate connecting with the stuff under our fingers...into a form with an independent life.' Always made as pots first, but inevitably linked to still-life painting, Hanssen Pigott's work is valued in both spheres.

She started to make groupings of pots, calling them 'inseparable', or 'still life' groups, because she wanted them to be considered in a way that 'might raise a question, lengthen a glance *(see Plate 21: previous page).* The space between the pots became as important to her as their shapes and colours, and she is precise about the way they should be placed together, with 'tensions and resolutions, quirky relationships and sometimes a certain, restful, classicism.' She also prefers them to be viewed at certain eyelevels and in certain lighting.

Not all the work is still. A touring exhibition about landscape provoked her to make horizontal groupings, some 'wandering', some 'craggy' and some 'dishes limpid and liquid as lagoons.' Groups like *Jug Parade* came about because 'sometimes the colour, shapes, juxtapositions and jostlings suggest more of a street theatre than a silence', and the title *Exodus* was given to two long lines of small, anonymous domestic pots that appeared to be displaced, crossing borders and seeking refuge. New works are more like families: 'They are rather pale, like memories: matt like frescoes.'[520] The first, *Procession,* was made after her father's funeral; in another called *Waiting*, the pots huddle in groups or stand aloof. 'Beauty, and our response to it, remains a mystery', she said in 1997:

> ...But it seems to me that, in the alchemy of making, the pot becomes subtly humanised. It is as though a kind of knowing - a history of understanding, and a sort of longing is translated, through care and consideration, and an intimate connecting with the stuff under our fingers...into a form with an independent life. With its own power to move.'[521]

Stephen Bowers

Stephen Bowers, initially from Sydney, became involved in ceramics in the late 1970s when looking for a challenge while teaching in a country town in South Australia. He did a traineeship in the Jam Factory's ceramic workshop in Adelaide in 1982, and spent the next five years as an art teacher during the day and a potter at night. There was a strong influence in the early years from the Adelaide version of 'Funk' ceramics. In 1990, Bowers himself became head of the ceramics workshop at the Jam Factory, responsible for both training of staff and the workshop's production output. At the same time he maintained his own practice of painting on vessels and also contributed to some large public art projects including a commemorative birdbath in a park and fittings for the ceiling in an inner city arcade.

His work is almost always functional in its form, and ranges from mugs, jugs, teapots, plates and platters that are mainly domestic in their purpose, to monumental urns and jardinieres intended for large public places. For the large items he usually collaborates with colleague Mark Heidenreich who is

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[520] Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1997)

[521] Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1997)

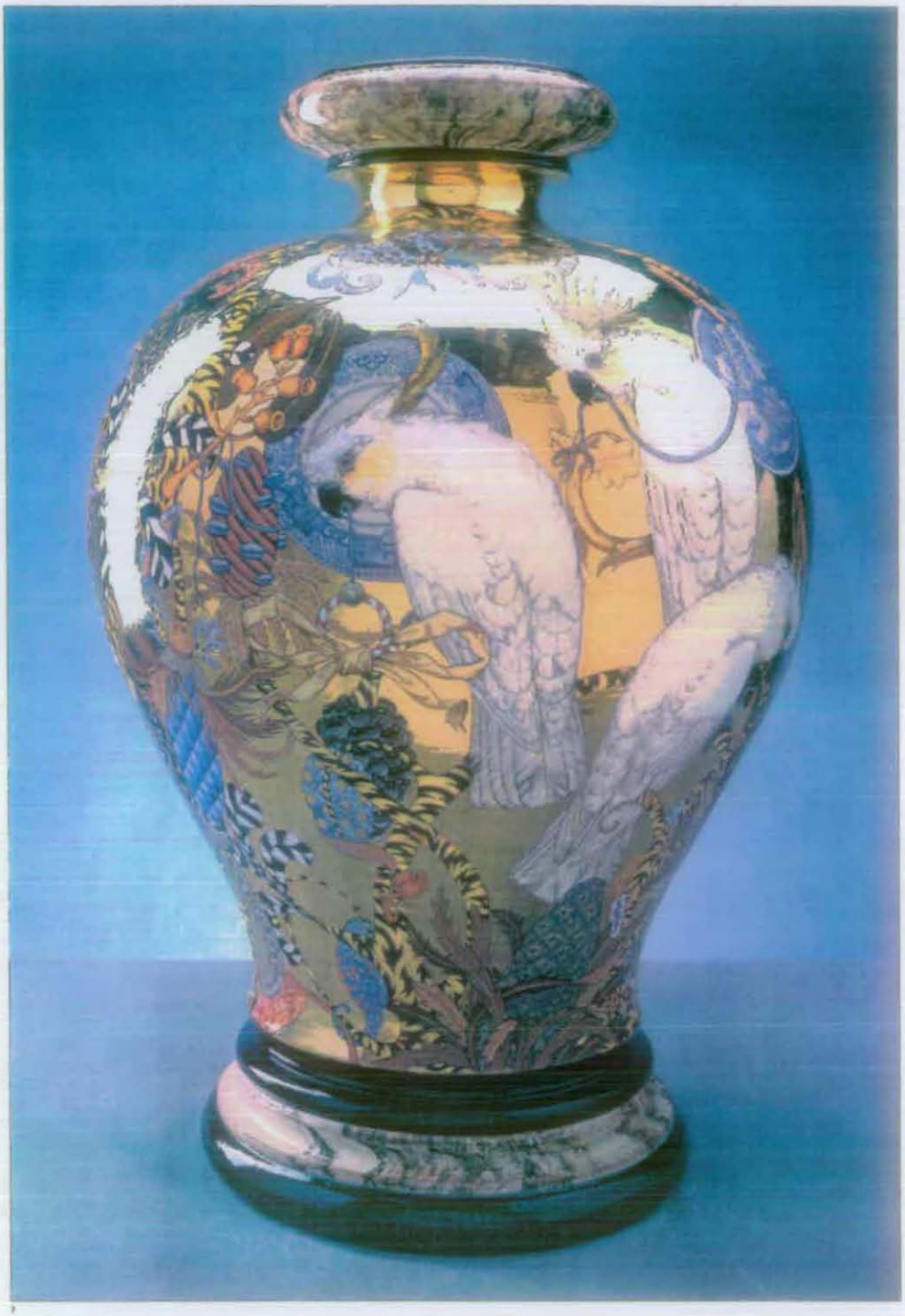

Plate 22: Stephen Bowers
(see page 196) *Chintz vase with Cockatoos*, underglaze and on-glaze enamel and lustre decoration on a terracotta-earthenware clay, made in Adelaide in 1994. (85 x 56cm)

Bowers brings together in his work many of the traditions from the history of ceramics. In this work, for example, surrounded by the gold lustre used by Islamic potters and European porcelain factories, are suggestions of eighteenth century Indian textile prints and designs from 19th century Japanese dinnerware. A 'willow pattern' fragment includes the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Luna Park and the Opera House instead of the more familiar pagoda, bridge and teahouse. Scraps of May Gibbs's drawings of the *Gumnut Babies* are mixed with illustrations from *Alice in Wonderland* and a few contemporary motifs like light bulbs and band-aids. All are combined with some clearly Australian motifs like cockatoos and gum-nuts against an imitation 'classical' marble background.

an expert thrower of large pots. The forms themselves, large or small, are crucial in the meaning of each work, but at the same time they are the basis for ordering his interest in the decoration of their surfaces. His drawing skills, and the way these are carried out through ceramic materials, are considerable, but the drawings are more than decoration and illustration. They are witty collages that betray thoughtful research and intelligent observation. *(see Plate 1: before Contents page)*

Bowers brings together in his work many of the traditions from the history of ceramics. In any one piece, one might find traces of many familiar styles and decorations. In *Chintz vase with Cockatoos*, for example, surrounded by the gold lustre used by Islamic potters and European porcelain factories, are suggestions of eighteenth century Indian textile prints and designs from 19th century Japanese dinnerware. A 'willow pattern' fragment includes the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Luna Park and the Opera House instead of the more familiar pagoda, bridge and teahouse. Scraps of May Gibbs's drawings of the *Gumnut Babies* are mixed with illustrations from *Alice in Wonderland* and a few contemporary motifs like light bulbs and band-aids. All are combined with some clearly Australian motifs like cockatoos and gum-nuts against an imitation 'classical' marble background. *(see Plate 22: previous page)*

During a four-month stay in an Australia Council studio in Barcelona, Spain, Bowers had the opportunity to study the historical and architectural ceramic treasures there. 'The opportunity to observe and research those ceramic collections,' he confirmed, 'has strengthened my desire to be informed by historical practice and technique, and to strive for a personal contemporary output that is supported by acquired skills.'[522]

Painstakingly painting and drawing over a white slip or on a light-bodied clay, using both under-glaze and on-glaze enamels, Stephen Bowers manages to condense the roughly two-thousand-year history of porcelain decoration, tin-glaze, lustred maiolica and china-painting onto contemporary works that also say something very particular about his view of Australia.

From industrial traditions

Rod Bamford (born 1958) and Patsy Hely (born 1946) both trained as studio potters but are now using aspects of semi-industrial processes in their work. They are not designing for industry, although, at times this has been a consideration for them. Instead, they could be described as now dealing as much with the idea of ceramic production and of the function of ceramic objects, as in making objects that can actually be used.

Rod Bamford

After graduating in 1979, Rod Bamford continued to study the social and technological aspects of ceramic traditions, through experiences as broad as

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[522] Stephen Bowers, interview 1998

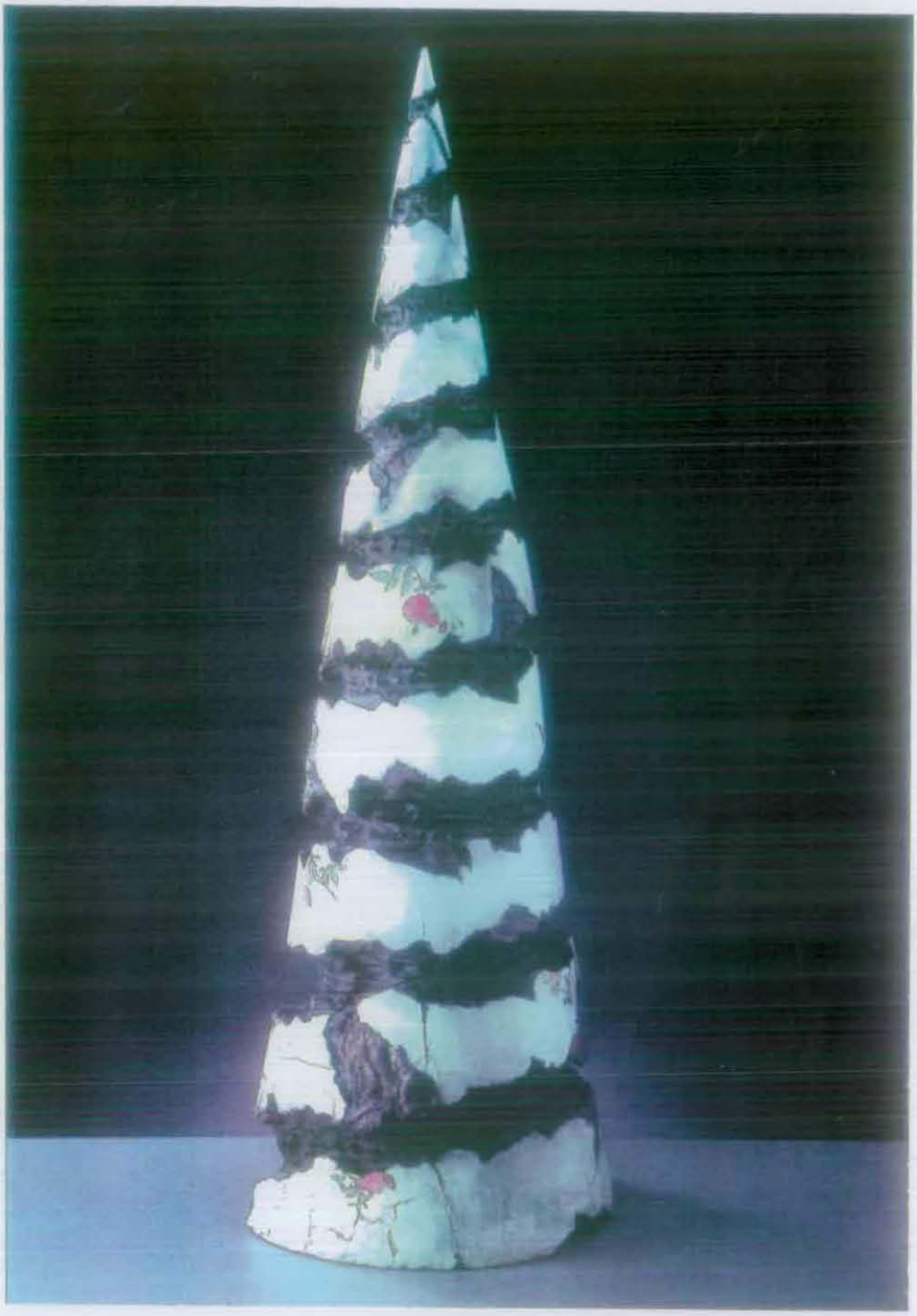

Plate 23: Rod Bamford
(see page 198) This ceramic form, *Cone Aspire*, was made in five parts using a range of production processes including moulding, brick-extrusion, glazing and transfer-printing, in Sydney, in 1988-89. (180 x 63cm)

In the late 1980s Rod Bamford (b1958) worked with architectural or geometric forms such as spires, cones, spheres and finials to contrast two aspects of celebration - of death and achievement. *Cone Aspire* is a metaphor for both form (a spire) and intent (aspire). Modern industrial extruded clay is combined with transfer-printed images (or decals) of roses that one would expect to find on old domestic porcelain, and fragments of moulded classical figures. The deep-gouged spiral groove, in which the figures are embedded, is meant to suggest the Tower of Babel, the energy of a driving tool and the path of civilisation. Interview with Rod Bamford 1989.

working in a village in India and investigating collections in the museums of Europe and England. He is now most interested in using ceramic forms as the starting point of a narrative. The purpose of an object like a cup or a brick is now purely to tell part of a story, but a story that is still saying something about its function and the process of making it.

In 1986 he made some works in painted and glazed earthenware that were presented as ceramic shards or fragments, reminiscent of an archaeologist's catalogued collection. However, the familiar domestic cup-handles and saucer rims in this 'collection' were disconcertingly gigantic in scale. He also began to combine fragments of well-known historical pieces or styles in new contexts, with titles that were amusing in their relation to ceramic history, for example: *The contemplation of Josiah on Wedgwood, Willow pattern revisited,* and *Kändler's last laugh.*[523] He observed at the time:

> Part of my work is about the struggle between craft and the fine arts. I want to present the extraordinary breadth of the history of ceramics and excite interest in it. The social history of pottery is fascinating. The making of porcelain created a link between European and Chinese civilisations. The alchemists turned their skill to the making of porcelain and developed the first European porcelain, which was then taken up by the aristocracy for their own use and so played a part in the creation of social hierarchies.[524]

Later, Bamford worked with architectural or geometric forms such as spires, cones, spheres and finials. Through these he contrasted two aspects of celebration - of death (using the form of the gravestone) or of achievement (through shapes such as spires). In these works he consciously used a range of production processes for both aesthetic and metaphorical reasons. In *Cone Aspire*, for example, modern industrial extruded clay is combined with transfer-printed images (or decals) of roses that one would expect to find on old domestic porcelain, and fragments of moulded classical figures. The deep-gouged spiral groove, in which the figures are embedded, is meant to suggest the Tower of Babel, the energy of a driving tool and the path of civilisation. *(see Plate 23: previous page)*

Developing his interest in the ways in which meanings are related to materials and processes as well as ideas, he worked, in 1989, as an artist-in-residence in the huge Kohler Company Factory in Wisconsin in the United States that makes sanitary wares from industrial porcelain. Here he had the opportunity to assemble large installations from small industrially-made components of his own design *(see Plate 24: following page):*

> I was taken over by the immense physicality of the place...The only way to deal with it was to forget preconceived plans, and instead to work from what

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[523]Wedgwood was an eighteenth century British ceramic manufacturer, Willow pattern was an English version of an Oriental blue-and white design style, and *Kändler* discovered the secret of making true porcelain for the German Meissen manufactory.

[524]Rod Bamford in Kim Oldroyd 'Unearthing the Future' *Craft Arts International* Oct/Dec 1987 82

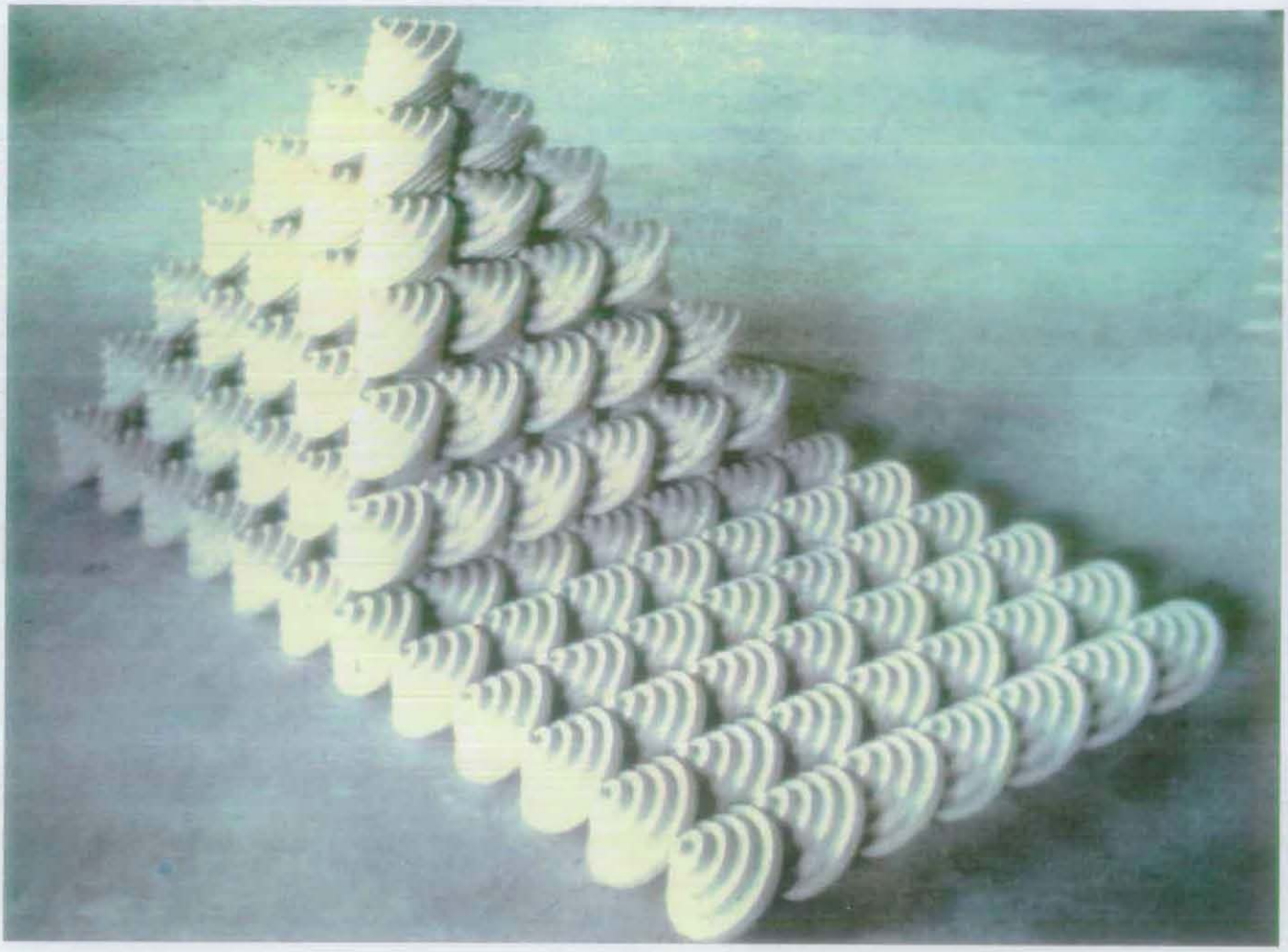

Plate 24: Rod Bamford
(see page 198) *Insensible Order* 2 is an installation of industrial 165 components made from industrial porcelain in the Kohler factory, USA, in 1989 (2.2 x 1.1 x 1.1m).

Most studio potters in the postwar period rejected industrial processes, and favoured a handmade aesthetic. But contemporary potters draw on many traditions. Rod Bamford (b1958) trained as studio potter but could be described as now dealing as much with the idea of ceramic production as in making objects that can actually be used.

In 1989 he worked as an artist-in-residence in the Kohler Company Factory in Wisconsin in the United States that makes sanitary wares from industrial porcelain. 'I was taken over by the immense physicality of the place...The only way to deal with it was to forget preconceived plans, and instead to work from what the place offered, realising that their materials and processes were inseparably linked. The restrictions of the factory moulded me as much as the product, and the only solution was to go with it, making work that linked conceptual ideas to the medium itself.' Interview, Rod Bamford 1997.

> the place offered, realising that their materials and processes were inseparably linked. The restrictions of the factory moulded me as much as the product, and the only solution was to go with it, making work that linked conceptual ideas to the medium itself.[525]

In 1994 he was one of a number of artists who were invited to the regional gallery in Ipswich, Queensland, to participate in a project where each would use local bricks. The Ipswich area has rich clay deposits and a long industrial ceramic history. Rod Bamford made a number of works around the idea that bricks are not only a module for building a dwelling, but also a symbol of a progressive society. He also saw connections between building with with bricks and the physical and genetic development of biological structures:

> The functional red brick rash has spread across the landscape for decades as a building material...becoming a symbol, a backbone or spine that has supported the societal organism as both a physical structure and a cipher for progress.[526]

The meanings in Rod Bamford's work are found in the ways viewers are provoked to make new associations by questioning their familiar experiences of functional and ornamental ceramic forms, as well as the processes that are used to make them.

Patsy Hely

Trained as a potter in the 1970s, and working at first in wheel-thrown stoneware, Patsy Hely started making decorated earthenware in the early 1980s. Always influenced by industrially produced ceramics, she started to develop ways of making moulds for slipcasting in 1982. The forms she eventually produced reflected a contemporary interpretation of perhaps commercial Art Deco wares from the 1930s, but she drew on visual images from many cultures and traditions, and was influenced as much by architecture and printed or woven fabrics, as by ceramics. While on the one hand Hely was interested in making a production range in the most efficient way possible, on the other hand she was very conscious of these visual sources of her ideas.

In the 1990s she set up a project in Lismore, where she now lives, where studio ceramists can work in the art school using small manufacturing equipment like jigger and jolley moulding machines. Despite this very practical enterprise, Patsy Hely has maintained a particular interest in more philosophical issues. She is interested in the value we have placed on the hand-made object over the industrially produced one: she argues that it is too simple to say that one is warm and good and that the other is cold and bad - people, including potters, have always used tools. Now using porcelain in her work, she observes that:

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[525] Rod Bamford, interview 1997

[526] Rod Bamford ibid (1997)

> ...because this material when thin is capable of transmitting light, I have increasingly sought to produce objects that require frequent lifting up, principally cups and jugs. This focus on the way we experience an object has now led me to explore the way objects are held, how they fit in the hand, the way they are passed from one user to another, their potential for transferring heat and cold to the skin. In short to see the 'using' of functional objects as an active event rather than a passive one.[527]

By 1995, interested in the dual issues of value and touch, she started to incorporate into her work objects that showed obvious signs of having being previously used, showing wear and tear:

> I started collecting old lids and handles at first, but quickly became an avid collector of all kinds of kitchen bits and pieces...all of the objects I found were machine made, yet I found I had a fondness for a lot of them...anodised aluminium, to green plastic knobs...it has made me question all manner of things - including what it is about objects that we value, and how those things are manifested in both hand and machine made ceramics.[528]

She combined these well-used objects that have had a previous, sometimes unrelated, function with her own undecorated, translucent porcelain forms. In one exhibition these groups or 'selections' of teapots, lidded bowls, coffeepots and beakers were displayed on special benches with kitchen surfaces like stainless steel, marble and wooden slats. The works combined recognisable components that had been well-used in their original function, with ghost-like forms that were seductively familiar in appearance and feel, and yet did not seem 'real'. Combining the familiar and unfamiliar, the industrial and the handmade, the social and the personal - these works reflected an intelligent understanding of a long ceramic history.

Conclusion

A combination of social, economic and philosophical factors in the 1980s caused some crafts practitioners and writers to start to question their dependence on the values and structures of art and the art world.

Many recognised that if they were going to direct their practice towards the ideals of 'art' (or design), they must accept that they need also to address the current issues of the art, or design, world at that time.

It also became clear that, within the new contexts of social and cultural change, the practices, histories and values of the crafts themselves remained worthy of specific attention, alongside their connections with art and design. The final chapter will enlarge on this conclusion.

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[527]Patsy Hely 'Moving Objects' Masters thesis 1995 10

[528]Patsy Hely *Flying Arts Gazette* October 1995 8

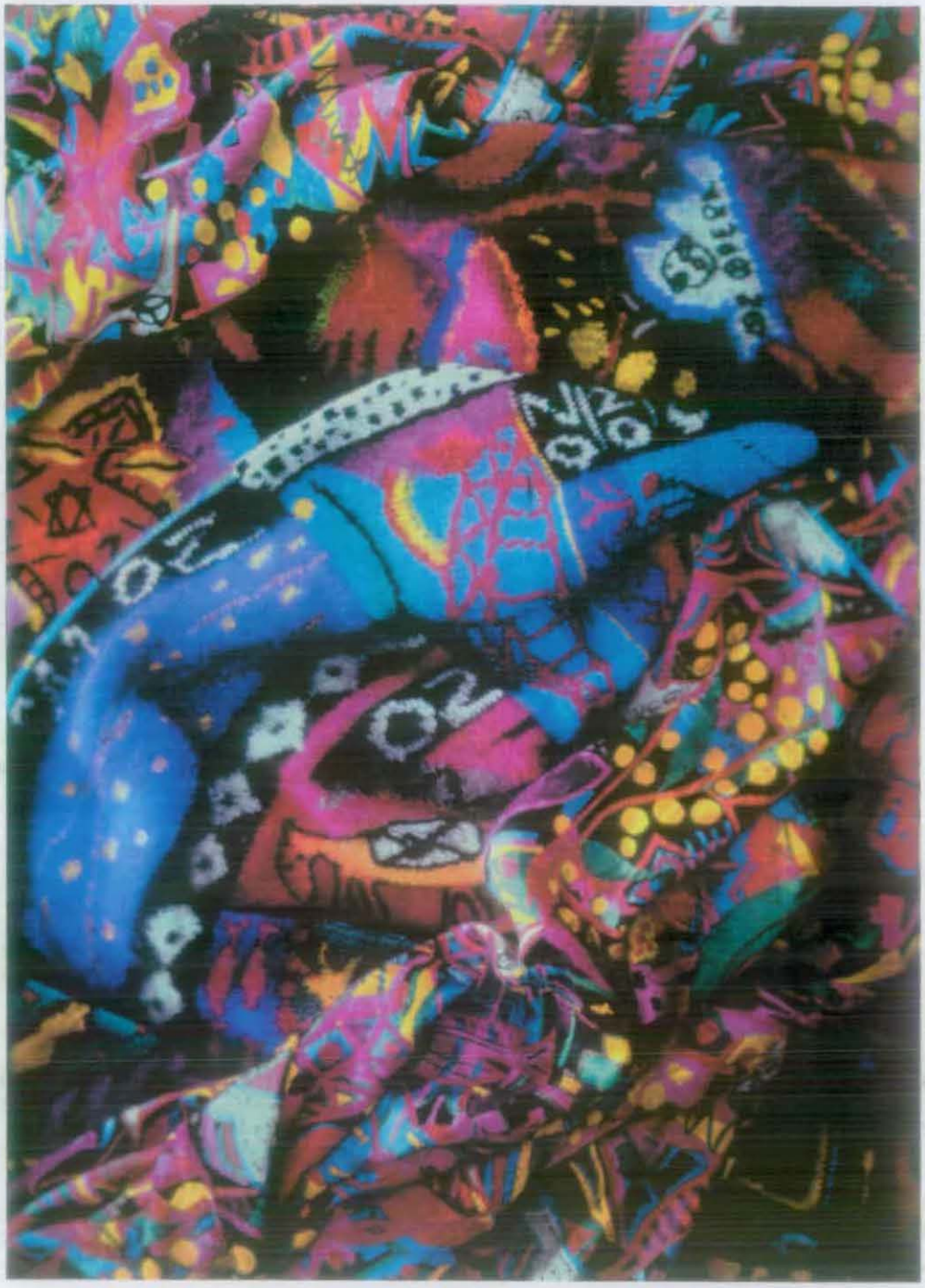

Plate 25: Jenny Kee
(see pages 101, 158) *Flying Oz* outfit (detail), designed by Jenny Kee in Sydney between 1984 and 1988.

Jenny Kee opened her shop Flamingo Park in Sydney in 1973. Her return to Sydney from London's Chelsea Antique Fair was prompted by the excitement of cultural change, which resulted among many artists in an overt expression of Australian identity. Kee focused on garments with well-known motifs like the Sydney Opera House, koalas, kangaroos, wattle and gumleaves. She was imaginative in her choice of manufacture, ranging from hand-knitting through local cottage industry to handprinting silk in Italy. This outfit includes *Flying Oz* printed jacquard silk (1984); and *Flying Oz 200* dress and *Kee Oz Collage* jacket, hand knitted in wool, angora, cashmere, mohair and alpaca yarns (1987/88).

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter will review a number of themes that have been common to all the chapters in the thesis, regarding the character and effect of the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals. It will summarise the nature of the postwar crafts revival as the contemporary crafts movement, within the context of a social history of the relationships between art, craft, design and industry. It will then look at two particular issues that provoked craftspeople to be interested in art ideals: firstly, the development of the perception of the artist as an individual; and secondly, the way our society has constructed hierarchies of value, in this case around the different practices of art and the crafts as they have been distinguished through certain media, forms and functions. Finally, it will survey some comments on the future of crafts practice.

Introduction

The contemporary crafts movement in Australia has taken several shifts in direction since its beginning in the late 1940s. Some people say it is over. Some seek to stabilise it in a position they believe remains central to shared social values. Some anticipate that a new cycle or revival will retrieve what they see as skills and values already lost. Others celebrate the great diversity of current practice.

Current crafts practice is certainly diverse. Some practitioners see their work as art and some as design, and some insist that what they do is, in fact, a craft. Some like an association with industry; some want an independent studio practice; others want to work within a community. Some see their work as part of a spiritual path to self-fulfilment and many see it as an escape from the 'rat-race'. Many see it as a small business and many others as an important part-time amateur activity. Some focus on materials and some on functions and forms, while others place greatest emphasis on their ideas. Some work with traditional tools and processes; others enthusiastically embrace current technologies as 'new tools'. Many follow most of these directions at the same time. Most people are extremely serious about what they do, however they see themselves, or describe themselves, and whatever sort of work they make.

This thesis has considered, within the broad context of crafts practice, the ideals of those people who, for various reasons, have sought for the 'crafts', an association with 'art'. I have been interested in where this ideal came from, the context in which it was followed, where it has led, and, moreover, what it might mean in the consideration of a way forward. Was the pursuit of art ideals by a significant sector of the contemporary crafts movement a rewarding course that offered liberation from traditions, or was it a trap that

served to lose the crafts some of their credibility through denying important aspects of those traditions?

Histories tend to reflect the values of dominant groups and the selective views of their historians. Those on the margins, like those in the crafts movement in relation to wider visual arts practices, have not always been in a position to articulate their differing views or experiences, however strong their following. It is really only in the last twenty years that such parallel but often ignored histories have been offered an opportunity for an equal place in the interpretation of the cultural life of 20th century Western society.[529] In the meantime, apart from their own specialist documentation, they have had to join the mainstream practices - like art or design - or be ignored.

Despite the obvious commitment of practitioners and their supporters, the exemplary professional record of so many clearly significant craftspeople and the very successful lobby of the crafts movement for institutional support, it is nonetheless plain, through its lack of inclusion in general Australian cultural histories,[530] in the confused public perception about crafts practice as a professional activity,[531] through the antagonism of elements in the art world towards them,[532] and even through the very wide range of terms that craftspeople use to describe themselves, that the crafts today do not have a single professional identity. Crafts practice is now so broadly placed across art, craft, industry and design that 'the movement' no longer has a single voice.

In reviewing the history of the contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, some issues emerge that make it possible to reach some conclusions about the value of such a pursuit, and to consider a place for the crafts, or crafts practice, in the future.

Throughout the development of the movement, within the changing nature of post-war Australian society, there have been two main issues that have contributed to the pursuit of art ideals. The first is the increasing belief in the artist as a special individual, the ways in which that idea has been reinforced and the attraction that it holds for craftspeople. The second is the way developments in both the crafts and design have been affected by the privileged status that has been conferred on the 'fine' arts of painting and sculpture, its artists and those who acquire it.

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[529]See Chapter 5 'Changing perceptions: art and cultural theory'

[530] See comments in Chapter 2 about the non-inclusion of the history of the crafts movement in other Australian social and cultural histories.

[531]See Chapter 4 'The Crafts Board' for findings of Crafts Enquiry 1975; and Chapter 5 'A Changing infrastructure' for similar findings after amalgamation of Visual Arts and Crafts Boards in 1987 that showed concern about this issue.

[532]For example, John Olsen, in a review of Bernard Smith's 'Death of the Artist as Hero' *Weekend Australian* 27-28 February 1988, said 'It is a policy of our present government to encourage the craft scene as a social palliative...what must be faced is the decline of aesthetic principle; nobody seems to know what excellence is any more.'

The nature of the postwar crafts revival

This thesis has focused on the changing relationships in a triangle whose points might be the practices of art, craft and design. The perceived differences in value between art and craft have been debated for several hundred years, while the changing relationship between the crafts and industrial design and manufacture have also been reviewed since modern industrial manufacture began in the eighteenth century.[533]

There was once little differentiation in status between what are now distinguished as 'art' and 'craft', and in many societies today a distinction is still not made because value is applied for different reasons: the ritual or ceremonial function of an object might command greater importance than its economic prestige or the identity of its maker. However, over time, the separation of ideas from skill in the hierarchy of cultural values of Western societies has placed a greater status on the fine arts (now seen to do with ideas and intellect) over the crafts (now to do with skills and functions). Whereas ideas and skills were once closely related, they became oppositions, a distinction that is now reinforced through associations with certain media and processes and the functions that various kinds of works perform. Distinctions of cultural value now exist between practitioners who work in 'fine arts' and 'crafts' media; and separations identified by media and function now exist in ideas about theory and practice, often discussed and institutionalised as oppositions of head and hand, mind and body, skill and thought. The fact that it is often now an issue whether an object or a practice is identified as art, craft, design or industry, or that it might matter, reflects those changes.[534]

The contemporary crafts movement initially sought to revive and maintain the perceived ideals of aspects of what was understood as traditional crafts practice, but it did so in a new context with a new kind of practitioner and a new audience, and, as part of that revival, it developed new relationships with both contemporary design and contemporary art. It developed in the early post-war years at a time of marked social change and expectation, when crafts-based industries were declining, and when new influences in contemporary architecture, design and art arrived from overseas.[535]

At that time most craftspeople's objectives were to produce simple, handmade, domestic products that reflected an attitude towards a particular way of life that valued beauty in simplicity and functional form, in a studio or small workshop environment where the maker could be independent and self-sufficient and in control of all the processes of production. In many ways these aspirations have since been identified as an anachronistic, romantic 're-

[533]See Chapter 2 'Introduction'
[534]See Chapter 5 'Reviewing crafts ideals'
[535]See Chapter 2 'The beginnings of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia'

invention' of tradition,[536] but at that time - and even now - it was certainly a strong philosophy that ran counter to the perceived inhumanity of modernist design and its associated technologies, and of post-war consumerism.

At the same time, the strong and influential stream of thought and practice associated with studio crafts practice ran parallel to the development of dealer galleries and the international art market, of which Australia aspired to be part.[537] After the war, New York represented freedom and modernity, and the ideal of freedom of expression by visual artists was followed by similarly motivated craftspeople working in textiles, metal, glass and ceramics.

Studio craftspeople who started their careers in the postwar decades wanted some of the status and power they saw being accorded individual artists working in the art world. Thus, they tried to adopt or duplicate the institutions of the art world, emulate its attitudes, and gain access to the same markets. 'To put it crudely,' said John Houston:

> ...the Crafts movement is the Arts and Crafts movement after the architects had defected...it was their overall view of all the arts and crafts developing harmoniously within a building, within a city, within a world unified by art that lovingly bound all the others, that lent the movement its social, as well as its aesthetic conviction. Their defection made each craft autonomous: free to evolve; free to stagnate. As industrial design became the new crafts...the hybrid artist-craftspeople scattered in their separate searches for the new authority of their own traditions, their own aesthetics.[538]

But even 'design' followed art world values. The crafts had always maintained a close connection with industry and design, but now designers themselves also aspired to be seen as individual artists, or be discussed as such. Design historian Adrian Forty argues against this ideal, especially the separation of the designer from a market:

> Whatever degree of artistic imagination is lavished upon the design of objects, it is not done to give expression to the designer's creativity and imagination, but to make profits more saleable and profitable. Calling industrial design 'art'...effectively severs most of the connections between design and society.[539]The crafts had always enjoyed an active connection with the marketplace, but this connection also changed.[540]

Peter Dormer points out that crafts practice had been 'an act of service' up to and in the 1950s and 1960s, when the crafts were supported not by museums, but by ordinary householders, who 'wanted to add something to their homes that fed their eyes and their fingers', filling a gap left at that time by fine art. It was an aesthetic-in-opposition to both modern art and modern design. But gradually, in supplying consumers:

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[536]For example, see T J Jackson Lears *No Place of Grace* (1981) cited in Chapter 2
[537]See Chapter 3 'The influence of art'
[538]John Houston *Crafts Classics Since the 1940s* (1988) 8
[539]Adrian Forty *Objects of Desire* (1986) 7
[540]Discussed in different contexts over time in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5

> ...'taking their fancy' has replaced 'serving their needs' or, as many craftsmen would prefer it, aesthetic value has replaced utility as their goal. What remains, however, is the question of whose taste becomes predominant - the 'popular' taste of the consumer or the particular...taste of the individual maker...[there shaped up]...a new, less rigorous contract of service between craftspeople and consumers.[541]

To a certain extent, the pursuit of art ideals was effective through the 1960s and early 1970s, as the art world and its wider audience allowed an opportunity for, and encouraged, craftspeople to dismiss traditions in favour of individual expressive intent and the making of non-functional objects, and fine artists themselves adopted some of the formerly marginal 'craft' and 'domestic' materials and processes. Eventually, however, in abandoning late modernist formalism in the 1970s, fine artists also generally abandoned an interest in making objects, and (as the Dadaists had demonstrated earlier in the century) tended to reject that fine finish, function, enjoyment of process and an interest in materials could contribute to the content of a work. Their views were not necessarily 'right'(they pertained to their particular time), but they were well reinforced by galleries, art schools and critics.

Like others in marginal areas of the performing arts, literature, science and sport,[542] the only way craftspeople could gain recognition was through the existing channels of education, promotion and marketing that favoured art ideals. However, despite the important liberation of tradition that undoubtedly occurred for those making 'art-craft', craftspeople seeking wider recognition chose or had to use, and have used about them, the language and values and perceptions of the art world at that time. It was the predominant avenue available.

The result was perhaps not what was intended.[543] The economic structure for the 'quasi-art' that developed, said Peter Dormer:

> ...has been provided by art school teaching, state museums...magazines, state grants, and, especially in America, the existence of rich people willing to be persuaded by dedicated dealers and gallery owners that to buy the new craft was to buy the new art. As far as the new breed of craftsperson is concerned there was a wide degree of licence to be enjoyed. As long as he or she produced work which more or less conformed to the new quasi-art establishment's expectations of what craft as art should look like, then he or she was free to make all sorts of useless objects. [Then] something rather sad and predictable has since occurred', he said. Those who tried to get their new 'broken-all-the-rules-in-my-Art-Craft' work accepted were rejected by the real

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[541]Peter Dormer, 'The ideal world of Vermeer's little lacemaker', in John Thackara *Design after Modernism* (1988) 138, 139

[542]See for example, Brian Stoddart *Saturday Afternoon Fever* (1986) for an account of games in relation to a history of Australian sport.

[543]See Chapter 5 'Introduction' and 'Reviewing crafts ideals'

art world, which 'may be unfair, and it is certainly arbitrary. But what is and what is not 'Art' is decided by the art world...[544]

Why was it possible for the art world to so convincingly call the tune?

The artist as individual

From the nineteenth century, crafts and design development had both been affected by an accelerating belief in the artist as a special individual and in the associated privilege or status that was conferred on the 'fine' arts of painting and sculpture, its artists and those who commissioned or purchased it.

These views were associated with the social, economic and political changes of the time, where art became a commodity for investment and symbol of status for the new middle class. Raymond Williams, in his book *Keywords*, traces the histories of words like art, culture, industry, class, democracy, society, individual, creative and genius, and shows that their current meanings emerged only as recently as the nineteenth century, a century characterised by industrialism, imperialism and colonialism - and one that brought new meanings to such terms. He points out, for example, that distinctions between the kinds and purposes of human skill in relation to art, industry and the useful arts 'can be primarily related to the changes inherent in capitalist commodity production, with its specialization and reduction of use values to exchange values'.[545]

Thus, the identity of the individual, rather than the anonymous, artist helped provide status and value. The rise of the middle class in the nineteenth century, and its desire to improve itself, provoked changes in art patronage and in the art they wanted. The middle class, not just the aristocracy, was becoming rich and keen to buy material goods.

Many artists (in much the same circumstances as in the 1970s) rejected what was occurring in both art and industry.[546] Some of those associated with the 'design reform' of the time rejected the function of art that was to serve the fashionable tastes of the new middle classes: they chose to make 'Art' for its own sake. Others rejected an association with industry, where there had been a desire to excessively embellish products with decoration, and (following leaders like William Morris) returned to medieval ideals of crafts production, through the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century. While reflecting a desire to unite decoration with form, in harmony with nature, reformers were also reacting to the loss of hand skills through industrial production and were revaluing creative labour.

In comparing the intent behind the work of the Arts and Crafts movement in 1893 (where designers employed others to carry out the work), with the studio

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[544] Peter Dormer op cit (1988) 140, 141

[545] Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1985) 42. See Chapter 2: 'Introduction'

[546] Discussed in Chapter 2 'Introduction' and 'A precursor of ideals'.

crafts practised in England in 1953, Peter Floud observed that the main criterion 'normally employed today in defining craftwork - namely the identity of designer and craftsman - received little attention in 1893.' It was the 'second-generation' of educators who followed, like W. R. Lethaby, 'who were preoccupied with the application of craft principles to the training of art-students and education generally,' and who, '...by first stressing the didactic and therapeutic value of craftwork - paved the way for the present-day belief that craft products have a special value in that they express the individual personality of the maker in a direct unmediated way that is impossible in the case of work - even handwork - undertaken at second-hand.'[547]

The increasing value placed by Western society on the notion of 'the individual' and 'the authentic self' in the twentieth century, increased following the disintegration of nineteenth century social orders that had been defined, for example, by class and religion. The development of the ideal of the independent individual can be followed through the fascination with theories of the unconscious mind; the education programs that focused on the development of the self rather than on prescriptive curricula; the pursuit of material possessions and a 'home-of-your-own' for the nuclear family within a society committed to personal success and national 'progress' in the 1950s; to the extreme personal searches for emotional and spiritual meaning and 'self' in the 1960s - summarised by Tom Wolfe as 'The Me Decade'.[548]

All these ideas of achievement or development were associated with the expression of individual identity, within changing notions of wider social, national and international identities. Even in the rural communes that developed in Australia and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s, and the supportive, specialist societies that they formed which often included craftspeople, Margaret Munro-Clark has observed that 'it is usually the individual rather than the collective whose interests are paramount...Other goals tend to be seen mainly as a means to the development and expression of an authentic self'.[549]

In 1995 British writer, Peter Dormer, was invited to address audiences in Australia. A long-time observer of craftspeople and their work, he suggested of the intelligent and yet sometimes obscure meanings of contemporary works, that:

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[547]Discussed in Chapter 2 'A precursor of ideals'. Peter Floud, 'The Crafts Then and Now', *The Studio*, April 1953, in John Houston, *Craft Classics Since the 1940s* (1988) 49-50. Floud compared contemporary practice with that of 1893, the year in which the *Studio* was first published.

[548]See for example, Tom Wolfe 'The Me Decade' in *Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine* (1990) 126-7

[549]Discussed in Chapter 2 'The crafts movement and social change'. Margaret Munro-Clark 'Modernity, Individualism and the impulse to Withdraw' in *Communes in Rural Australia* (1986) 23

> ...studio craft and what we might call studio design is becoming less geared towards being a public art form and is becoming more and more a private art form based on private negotiations between an individual maker and an individual viewer or purchaser who is able to accept the private story that the maker has been exploring. In a sense contemporary applied arts is becoming like a multiplicity of private, devotional objects...in art, craft and design, unity of purpose has been replaced by an obsessive interest in the self and in the small change of personal responses to the world...

However, he warned, 'there is a contradiction. The makers and purveyors of private devotional objects never the less want public recognition - exhibitions, catalogues, books and the general circus of public acclaim. They simply want it on their own terms.'[550]

Thus, in such ways, we have all been encouraged throughout this century to see ourselves as independent people, seeking personal satisfaction through our work and ways of life and the personal expression of our ideas and opinions. Most of us have not shared the common social orders and common identities as our ancestors, or as many other peoples in the world today. More than at any other time, artists in the late 20th century are able to draw upon 'traditions' from almost everywhere in the world. This is particularly so in places like Australia that have such a history of migrations from elsewhere. All Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, have the dilemma of 'being an individual' by trying to define two identities: the identity of a source culture - sometimes long-detached, and the identity of living in Australia today: being 'Australian'.

Context defines value

The ideal of a subjective, expressive individual beyond society's and the market's concerns is a construction of the Western world that was, and still is, supported by particular social and institutional structures.[551] Almost everything we believe or do is the result of the way society has, over time, constructed values, conventions or 'truths' to suit the purpose of a particular group.[552] Everyone working in the arts is a product of a history of attitudes about what art is or what artists are; how values are placed on works produced in different media; what values are placed on skills, processes and attitudes to materials; what language is used; and what art does, or should do.

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[550]Peter Dormer 'Novelty Value' *Craft Victoria* Summer 1995 6. Dormer was in Australia to address the national crafts conference 'Making Culture: Craft Communications and Progress'.

[551]See for example, Sylvia Kleinert 'An Historical Context' *Ausglass* post-conference edition 1991

[552]Chapter 5 discusses the development of these ideas in the crafts within the development of cultural theory in the 1980s. See examples provided in eg. Janet Wolff *The Social Production of Art* (1981) and *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (1983), Howard Becker *Artworlds* (1982), Penny Sparke *Design in Context* (1987)

It is convention, not truth, that now defines a category of activity or product as the 'fine arts', based around certain practices like painting, sculpture (and sometimes architecture). Convention also places greater value on the fine arts than on for example, pots, jewellery, furniture, costume and textiles, which are now distinguished as the crafts, or 'craft'. But, as the 'practical distinctions [between artist, scientist, technologist, artisan, craftsman and skilled worker] are pressed, within a given mode of production,' said Raymond Williams, 'art and artist acquire ever more general (and more vague) associations, offering to express a general human (i.e. non-utilitarian) interest, even while, ironically, most works of art are effectively treated as commodities.'[553] Whether or not fine artists, craftspeople and designers know the history of these attitudes, or whether or not they think it is important, they are still both consciously and unconsciously a product of that conditioning.

As Michael Carter points out, in his book *Framing Art*,[554] what a work means, or how it functions, is the result of several intersecting histories of attitudes. Firstly, there is the specific history of each artist, with its complexity of attitudes and prejudices, experiences and skills, class, race, gender, age, place, time, education and opportunity. Then there are the parallel experiences of the audience or client, who will have different attitudes and prejudices and experiences to bring to a meaning of what has been made.

Moreover, each work carries with it the histories of its materials, including 'art' media like paint, ink, paper, stone, bronze and video as well as 'craft' media like clay, fibre, glass, leather and metal. Huon pine means something different from bamboo; gold has a different meaning from that of uranium.

The history of a work also includes the circumstances of its production and the functions that it has variously performed: a table has a different functional history from that of a chair; a wedding ring from a manacle. Finally, every object changes its meaning through the changing public and domestic contexts in which it is placed.[555] These histories bring unconscious perceptions of meaning with them about those kinds of objects and materials. One cannot use these media, or attempt to challenge or subvert them without acknowledging their wider cultural associations *(see for example, Robert Baines's table in*

[553]Raymond Williams op cit (1985) 42

[554]Michael Carter *Framing Art* (1990), see Introduction

[555]For example, Brian O'Doherty discusses the ways in which art galleries take work from the contexts of their production and ascribe new meanings for them by the way they are exhibited inside the 'white cube' of a neutral gallery space. Brian O'Doherty, *Within the White Cube* (1976). Michael Carter also talks about the imposed narratives in some galleries, where we are forced by the geography of the place to follow a sequence of events that has been decided for us. Michael Carter op cit (1990) 171-76. See also papers in Peter Vergo (ed) *The New Museology* (1989) such as Charles Saumarez Smith 'Museums, Artefacts, Meanings'.

Plate 27: after page 219). [556] Furthermore, what can be read as subversive in one decade can become a cliché in the next.

In other words, while the practices of art, craft, design and industry overlap, each area has generally had different purposes, audiences, markets, languages, histories and production processes. Most craftspeople know the traditional uses, beliefs and rituals associated with the forms or images they use, and they generally understand not just the technology of what they are doing but also the ways in which these technologies and functions have changed society along the way.

But it is now clear, borne out by the conclusions of education, funding, exhibition and publication programs discussed in this thesis, that if craftspeople combine areas of practice they have to understand how each area works and what it means. As Czechoslovakian glass artist Dana Zámecniková insists, 'if you want to make glass sculpture, you must study glass and sculpture'.[557] Craft work must then be considered also in terms of that area - whether painting, sculpture or industry - at that time.

So, society shapes values and meanings. However, artists are also able to choose different ways in which to operate within a society, and to decide what sort of relationship they want to have, as individuals, with audiences and markets. At various times artists have reacted against the demands of society: in both the late nineteenth century and in the 1970s, for example, they sought to remove their work from being an artworld investment commodity. In the 1970s many artists ceased making objects at all, in favour of ideas and events.

By the late 1980s some audiences were reacting against artworks that were now so obscure in their symbolic meanings that they felt they could no longer approach them. Many visual artists themselves were questioning whether they wanted to continue to work in a way that they saw was unconnected with society and that was dependent on literary measures of meaning and value. Others, especially those in the crafts and design, were questioning their dependence on the dominance of visual arts values, and were seeking a return to the values of different ways of working - that might include a different relationship with audiences.

Who is artwork for, and how is value and meaning gained from it? Is art for self or society, or can it be for both? And whether for self *or* society - whether an artist feels totally fulfilled through their personal self-expression, or whether a particular audience fully identifies with the meaning of the work - it does not necessarily follow that that the work will be successful, or significant.

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[556]For an extended discussion see Grace Cochrane, 'Function?' in *Ausglass* post-conference edition 1991

[557]Dana Zámecniková, in *Ausglass* post-conference edition 1991 6,7

The broader context of the time does seem to determine that 'art' is what a society says it is, or at least, in most cases, what the current informed and articulate part of that society says it is. And where then, in the end, do the crafts belong?

A new pursuit?

What is crafts practice today, and what does 'craft' mean? In asking the same question of 'design', Adrian Forty suggests that it really means two things at the same time: the way things look (I like the design), combined with the preparation of instructions for manufacture (I am working on a design for something).[558]

And so it might be for 'craft': this word is most commonly used as a description for a category of objects that are made from 'non-art' materials, a distinction now made through the separate identification of painting and sculpture as 'fine art'. It is in this usage of 'craft as category' that the word causes so many problems, and is often now replaced by other terms like 'contemporary applied art', 'art and design', and even the earlier term, 'decorative art'. Given that institutional structures, like universities, art schools and museums, have long been set up to support a classification by medium and end-function into art, craft and design, it seems unlikely that this usage will change significantly, except towards 'neutral' terms like 'artwork' or simply, 'work' or 'practice'.

However, I would argue that 'craft' really means a particular way of making things - an attitude to production.[559] Craftspeople centuries ago did not 'make craft' - they applied it: they applied their craft (their skills, knowledge and imagination) to the making of vessels, ornaments, furniture, lengths of cloth - and paintings. But they approached their work in a certain way: their materials, processes, skills and markets were important to them, and they made their work by hand. Craftspeople have always enjoyed a close public and domestic acceptance of their products and attitudes towards making them, through our familiarity with the forms, materials and functions of what they make. It is a social affinity, certainly traditional and now often romantic. Our society still finds it important.

'When crafts organisations say they want to promote craft', observed Peter Timms in 1996, 'they no doubt think they mean the act of making things as much as the things made, but the syntax certainly suggests otherwise.' The increasing use of the word 'craft' as a noun rather than a verb, does 'reflect quite a fundamental change in the way we think about what the activity of

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[558]Adrian Forty op cit (1986) 6-7

[559]For an extended discussion see Grace Cochrane, 'Keeping Content: Crafts histories and curatorship', in Sue Rowley (ed) *The Meaning of Making: Contemporary Responses to Craft* (1997); originally paper to Interventions conference, Wollongong, 1992, part published in *Object* Spring, 1992

craft represents and why we think it is important (or not important as the case may be). For quite often the way we use language reflects more about our attitudes than what we believe we are saying.' The rapid loss of the verb 'to craft' is, he said, 'an impoverishment of the language...it no doubt suits the purposes of certain managerial and organisational structures to convince us that craft is not a process but a product, which can be used as a means of exchange'.[560]

Although the accessibility of both making and using has sometimes worked against crafts practice in earning it a perception of providing community therapy and therefore mediocrity, there is, in fact, a very clear public perception about what is really meant. Reviewers of films, novels and plays are among many who consistently use the term as one of value. Their understanding, and our understanding in this context, is that something that is crafted is made with care and attention and with a thorough understanding of materials, skills and processes *and* towards an imaginative end. In early 1997, for example, a newspaper headline reporting on a proposed scene cut to Baz Luhrmann's acclaimed film *Romeo and Juliet* used the term with confidence: 'Baz takes Bob to task over censoring his craft' - not, as it could well have been, his 'art' or his 'creation'.[561]

It is not surprising to check the Oxford dictionary and find, for 'craft', an association with terms like strength, force, intellectual power, dexterity, ingenuity and ability in planning and constructing (as well as magic, guile and cunning). A craft attitude is recognised in a very positive sense by the broadest population, which is why it is applied to everything from making bread to writing poetry, producing films - and making paintings. Pursuing an idea, through an affinity for materials and an enjoyment in, and commitment to, understanding the necessary skills and processes associated with them, remains the core of crafts practice.

The separation of 'imagination' and 'ideas' in the making of a work, from attitudes about skills and materials in the processes of its production, occurred when artists wanted to isolate themselves from what they saw as the crassness of the middle-class marketplace, and identify themselves as creative individuals. But I believe there cannot be exclusive oppositions between imagination *or* skills, intellectual *or* practical, personal *or* social. Each aspect is, to a greater or lesser extent, present in all creative cultural activities. Skills, processes and understanding of materials have never been enough on their own. But nor have ideas and imagination without practical resolution - or a marketplace, for that matter. In this sense, as Janet Wolff observes, the art/craft debate is less a comparative aesthetic or technological issue (which is

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[560]Peter Timms, 'Col Levy's Crafting' *Object* 1/96 4

[561]Candida Baker, discussing NSW Premier, Bob Carr's suggestion that this version of Shakespeare's play be included in the school curriculum, with the exception of a drug scene. *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 February 1997 4

the way it has been treated) than a sociological one, which might address why there is a debate at all.[562]

In considering rapid technological change, population growth and the dwindling of natural resources, today's philosophers and commentators are signalling the need for a renewed ecological and social consciousness, and one wonders where craftspeople and other artists belong in this kind of world. There have been a number of suggestions for a valid way forward for the crafts that are neither purely conservative in tradition nor uncritically dependent on other practices.

At the Ausglass conference in Sydney in January 1997, two people from outside the art world spoke about the role of art in today's society. Robin Williams, presenter of the ABC Science Show, and Eva Cox, a sociologist who gave the 1995 Boyer lectures, both independently discussed art as a *social activity* that was at its core, to do with both identity and communication.[563] Robin Williams talked about the development of language and art as the primary means of communication that reinforces bonds between people, so they can explain things to themselves and one another.

Eva Cox, whose ideal is for a 'civil society' that is not driven by economic rationalism, reminded us we are social beings, and that connections and communications - through arguing, sharing, dissenting and collaborating - are more important than competition. She argued for the concept of a public culture, a shared public sphere, in which the arts are a way of seeing and sharing: a way of combining what an individual might want to do, with what society can provide and what one can also give. Both, from their very experienced and informed and different starting points, seem to be calling for a return to more of a shared social order, in which the crafts, because of their social role, play a part.

Their views are not completely new. They echo, for example, those of Kenneth Coutts-Smith, twenty years earlier, who asked in 1976:

> Are we on the threshold of an art which celebrates humanity in the form of living, breathing, feeling social relationships, rather than an art that proposes an abstract, invisible realm of ideas, haunted by incomplete men and women in isolation?'[564]

Tim Jacobs similarly forecast in 1989 that:

> It's quite conceivable that, in the future, in this society at least, the notion of craft will have shifted from being a thing, to being a value system, a way of behaving, an approach to problem solving. If it clarifies its meaning on that

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[562]Janet Wolff, paper to Crafts Council conference *The Social Context of the Crafts* Sydney 1988

[563]Robin Williams and Eva Cox, keynote addresses to Ausglass conference, Sydney College of the Arts, January 1997. *Ausglass conference report* 1997

[564]Discussed in Chapter 3. Kenneth Coutts-Smith 'Theses on the Failure of Communication in the Plastic Arts' *Praxis: Journal of Radical Perspectives on the Arts* No 3 1976 95

> abstract level, then the values that in the sixties were being manifested in the objects that people made, can become the values that inform actions generally.[565]

Even if the crafts (along with the other disappearing skills associated with, for example, technologies like photography, pressing vinyl records and typesetting) have become 'an endangered species', it may well be that we need to preserve them for the same reasons as we try to protect endangered plant and animal species and the world's diminishing natural resources. Like Elaine Heumann Gurian's idea of museums as 'savings banks of the soul,'[566] the crafts provide one measure of important physical and symbolic connections between skills, tools, materials, forms and functions.

Design writer John Thackara had queried in 1984 from an economic point of view, if in fact, crafts skills were really outdated in a modern industrial society: 'Australian industry cannot compete on price; volume production is not its strength. But the *reinsertion of crafts skills* could add value and perceived quality to industrial products such as furniture and building products.'[567] Jenny Zimmer agreed, considering in 1990 both the efforts of small industries who wanted original crafts-based prototypes, and those of architects and planners who wanted the collaborative input of artists and craftspeople in the 're-scaling' of buildings and public places, as legitimate and uncompromised ways forward for the crafts.[568]

Certainly, as larger crafts-based industries declined, and new technologies became more accessible, the practice of small crafts-based, custom-made, design-and-contract businesses increasingly seemed for many an appropriate and successful 'way to go'. Historian Humphrey McQueen was reported in 1992 as saying:

> New production methods can be expected to lead to diversified market strategies where customisation is no longer too expensive and becomes the norm rather than the exception; ...it is possible to consider global niche markets which are not mass markets [and which, as well, are not necessarily luxury markets].[569]

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[565]Tim Jacobs in 'Craft in Transit: the Next Decade', in Noris Ioannou, *The Culture Brokers: Towards a Redefinition of Australian Contemporary Craft* (1989) 67

[566] Elaine Heumann Gurian 'A Savings Bank for the Soul' keynote address Museums Australia Conference *Power & Empowerment* Sydney 1996.

[567]See Chapter 5. John Thackara *Design* 424 April (1984) 38-47

[568]Dicussed in Chapter 6 'Reviewing crafts ideals'. Jenny Zimmer 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater' *The Sydney Review* October 1990 10-11

[569]Peter Timms discussing Humphrey McQueen's conference paper to the Craft Australia 1992 conference in Perth, in 'Finding a Niche for Industry within Craft' *Art Monthly Australia* October (1992) 8

He suggested that 'to survive, craftspeople will have to seek a succession of marketing niches. To flourish, [they] will need to re-establish a place at the centre of production'.[570]

Towards these ends, the flexibility and personal control offered by some of the new technologies available was compatible with the maintenance of crafts skills and attitudes. In 1994, discussing William Morris's nineteenth century ideals of working in 'harmony with nature' and his examination of the nature of work within industrialisation, Peter Timms noted that:

> What Morris could not have anticipated...was the advent of what we now refer to as the new technologies which, ironically perhaps, have made possible his vision for small-scale manufacture, individualised working environments, decentralisation, dispersal, the unification of process and product, craft-based industry and the elimination of the division of labour. The microchip has made these things economically viable again. Morris's utopian dream begins to look quite practical.[571]

In 1995 John Thackara looked at these changes in the economy and technology alongside the rapid increases in world population and pointed out that without a reassessment of how we use our natural resources we would have none left by the year 2040. He suggested that craftspeople, being those 'who understand matter very deeply become very valuable in this exercise. Because it is only when understand matter very deeply that you can actually, most efficiently inform and promulgate the production, distribution and recycling systems which guarantee that matter does not get destroyed.'[572] Design historian Tony Fry also argued for the crafts as 'applied ecology', understood in terms of 'quality (as opposed to quantity)...and as an organic means to conserve, store and transmit human-centred knowledges essential for survival.' He advocated drafting 'craft out of the gallery, museum and academy and into the mess of everyday life, with all its uncertainties, not least the threatening contemporary ecological crisis'.[573]

Pursuing the continuing question of arts ideals, in relation to these views, Anne Brennan concluded in 1989 that she had had problems with some crafts practice and the language used about it, because she thought a lot of it was founded on misunderstandings of what has happened in the visual arts. She nevertheless believed:

> ...that we had a lot to learn from the visual arts, [but] that we had to be a little more informed and selective about how we did it...Perhaps the crafts need to undergo a kind of consciousness raising in the same way that women did in the

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[570]Humphrey McQueen, cited in Peter Timms ibid (1992) 8

[571]Peter Timms 'The future re-naturing of work' *Object* 3 1994 8-9

[572]John Thackara 'Mental and Material in the Information Age' *National Craft Conference report* Craft Australia 1995

[573]Tony Fry 'Re-inventing Craft for Re-creation' in Bob Thompson (ed) *Forceps of Language: an anthology of critical writing about objects, makers, users and society* (1992) 80-81

> seventies, so that instead of looking at men and saying, we're just the same as you, you look at the ways in which you are different...and see [those differences] as valid.[574]

Donald Brook, by 1992 a long-time commentator on visual art and crafts relationships, had reversed the issue and was saying:

> I see craft as occupying the entire range of the spectrum, and I see...the visual arts as constituting just one small segment of the spectrum. In a way my objective is the same as the objective of craftworkers has been for a long time, that is, to assimilate art and craft together. But I think craftspeople have been accepting rather uncritically the view that art is different and that it's superior, and they are trying to promote, to elevate the status of craft to what's perceived as a status of art. If one can get crafts accepted as arts, then one has done something for them in terms of glorifying them. I think the motive to assimilate the two together is correct, but the direction of thrust has been mistaken and one shouldn't have been thinking of elevating the crafts, but instead, of demystifying art.[575]

In England, in 1989, historian and Royal College lecturer Christopher Frayling summarised the recent path of the contemporary crafts, and identified some 'essential characteristics' at each stage. From 'The Country Pavilion of 1951' and 'The Craftsman's Art of 1973', he forecast the 'Fin de Siècle Crafts of 1995'. Here, after suggesting a number of changes of attitude and practice towards new technologies, past ideals, and changing marketplaces, he concluded that: 'Crafts will continue to provide a *challenge* - not from the perspective of the *avant-garde*, but from the perspectives of *good practice*, *integrity of intention* and *domestic utility*'.[576]

In 1996 Australian jeweller and metalworker Susan Cohn confirmed, for her, the need to maintain distinctions between craft, design and art *(see Plate 26: following page)*:

> My tradition is craft and I work at it at various levels - from the art gallery scenario to private clients to designing for Alessi. Once you call it something else, you can't refer to that tradition. I don't just design. I do make on all those levels of craft. That, to me, is what informs the work. There's been a problem in craft because craftspeople themselves have become inhibited by their own perceptions - they've seen it as second rate and want to be first rate. They have then struggled with other names. In doing that they give up the one special

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[574]Anne Brennan in 'Decoding Craft: Criticism, Theory and the Search for Models' in Noris Ioannou op cit (1989) 51-52

[575]Donald Brook in 'Decoding Craft: Criticism, Theory and the Search for Models' in in Noris Ioannou *The CultureBrokers: Towards a Redefinition of Australian Contemporary Craft* (1989) 52,53

[576]Christopher Frayling 'Tomorrow's World', in 'Comment' *Crafts* Jan/Feb 1989 17-18. Frayling suggested to his readers that by 1995 the crafts would have come to realise that the role of the avant-garde had been to seek out territory that the army itself would one day occupy.

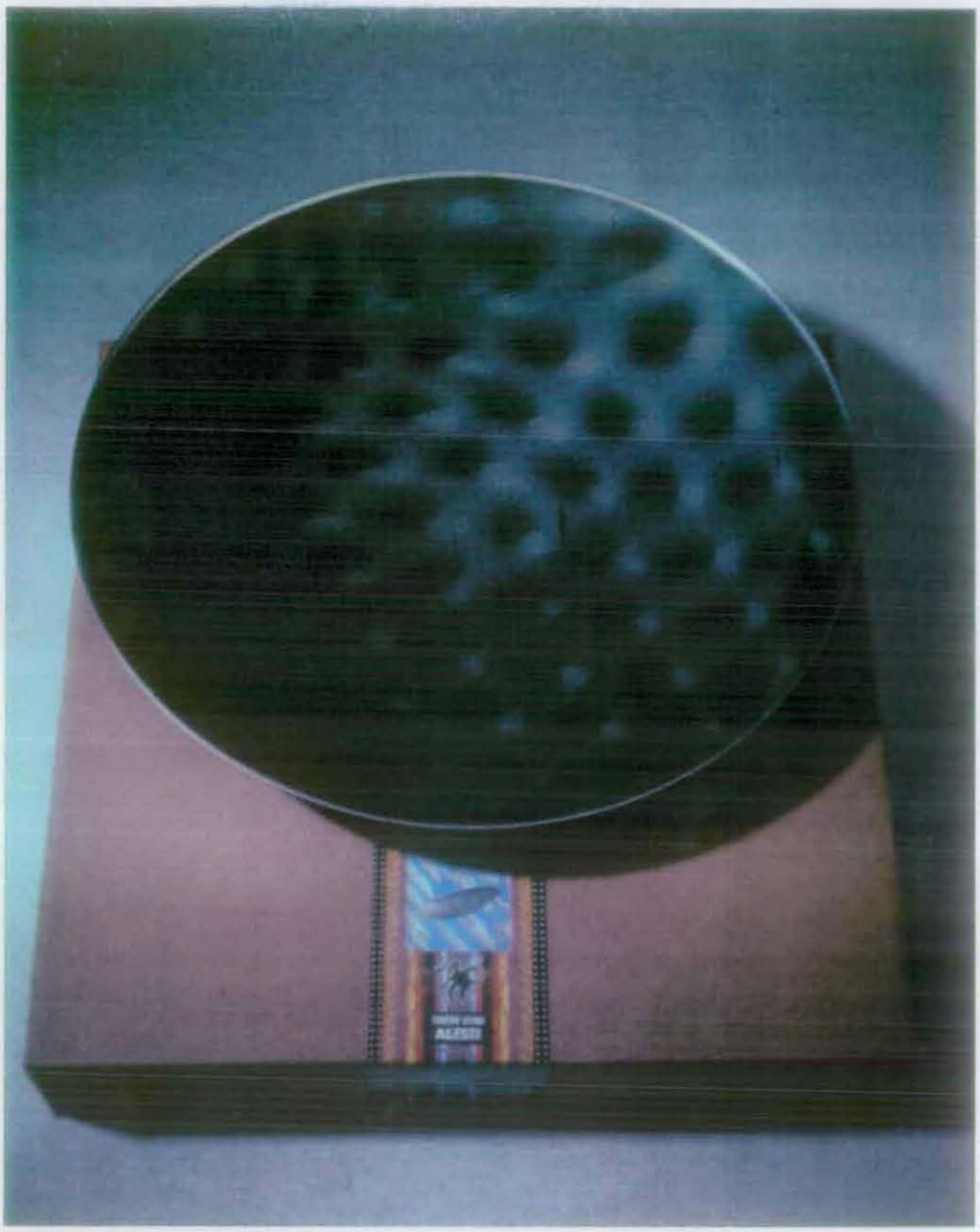

Plate 26: Susan Cohn
(see page 216) *Cohncave,* bowl made of two sheets of pierced stainless steel, anodised, with stainless steel rim (and packaging), designed by Susan Cohn and made by Alessi, Italy, 1992. (diam.50cm)

Susan Cohn (b.1952) set up Workshop 3000 in central Melbourne in 1981. She designs and makes jewellery and metalwork, mostly in aluminium with anodised decoration, while taking on trainees and contributing to wider crafts administration and education. In 1992 she was commissioned to design a bowl for the Italian manufacturer, Alessi. But she still calls herself a craftsperson. 'My tradition is craft and I work at it at various levels - from the art gallery scenario to private clients to designing for Alessi. Once you call it something else, you can't refer to that tradition. I don't just design. I do make on all those levels of craft. That, to me, is what informs the work.'
Susan Cohn in 'Craft Back From No Man's Land' *Smarts* 6 June 1996 13

> thing that they do have - that they can make things that can have an impact on everyday life.[577]

In fact, Rose Slivka's assertions of 1959 still read convincingly in our contemporary context. The crafts revival was 'not a nostalgic return to the handmade object on a wide functioning scale,' she had argued:

> We are as we must be, irretrievably an industrial society, [in which] the crafts have realised their own distinct...place, ...not in conflict with it, not absorbed into it - but existing within the larger structure, true to their own identity and to their own continuity [and where] we are creating new values in an entirely new situation... Maintenance of control over product from impetus of idea to completion is a reaffirmation of humanistic relationships - a relationship and responsibility to the object with which [the maker] invests his personality, and a relationship and responsibility to the person who uses it.[578]

However, during the nearly 40 years since that time, I believe that the pursuit of art ideals, which Slivka also encouraged, contributed to undermining the relationships she identified.

Conclusion

It should not really matter from which position people start or what they are called: the placing of cultural value should accommodate a number of purposes and practices to do with creative activity.

It should be possible, in the broader cultural sphere, for attitudes associated with crafts practice and what the crafts movement has meant, to be considered alongside other cultural practices of the period, because it appears that crafts values, which people persist in clinging to in recognisable cycles at similar moments in time,[579] do contribute considerably to our practical and expressive and symbolic understanding of ourselves.

If, as Adrian Forty points out, 'history...is concerned with the exploration of change',[580] it could be argued that the long and rich histories associated with crafts practice - of wearing, decorating, furnishing, ornamenting, performing ritual, containing, covering and so on - need to be discussed more fully outside its own infrastructure along with other cultural histories, such as those of art and design, in order to contribute to a fuller story of our time.

Inside the crafts infrastructure, a broader field for interpretation would widen understanding and value beyond 'art' parameters. Analysis of functions, processes and meanings of objects through their relationships to social,

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[577] Susan Cohn in 'Craft Back From No Man's Land' interview *Smarts* 6 June 1996 13

[578] Rose Slivka *Craft Horizons*, Mar/Apl 1959. See Chapter 3 'The World Crafts Council'

[579] See Grace Cochrane 'Said and Done: writing a history of the Crafts Movement', in Peter Timms (ed) *The Nature of the Beast* Craft Victoria (1993). See also T J Jackson Lears's discussions of similar cycles following times of social change, in *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (1981).

[580] Adrian Forty op cit (1986) 7

cultural, economic and political history, and through approaches of philosophy, psychology, sociology, archaeology or anthropology can all contribute as much to this field as a connection with the fine arts.

Alongside the issue of how something is identified as a practice, is the issue of how well it is judged to succeed - how 'good' or 'bad' it might be - an issue that will be different across time, from country to country and within the historical and theoretical expectations of the area of practice itself. 'The whole question of how people arrive at these judgements, and the arguments they invoke to support them seem to me to be extremely important subjects,' argued Adrian Forty, pointing out that we don't have to accept all points of view, but instead be able to talk about areas of disagreement.[581]

That point applies not only to critics, curators and historians, but to makers as well. If one thinks one is making 'art' primarily for oneself, it cannot be expected that all will agree about its meaning or its value - that is not its primary purpose, though it is rewarding when it occurs. Those making and developing designs for useful or decorative objects, or art works for an identified art world, are more likely to bear a market in mind, and the market will then determine value. Both positions are equally valid; one is not more important than the other. But, as Suzanne Frantz insists, one thing is not *automatically* the other, although sometimes they overlap.[582] Art does not always come with an appreciative market, and that might not necessarily mean that the market is misinformed, but that the maker might be.

The pursuit of art ideals in the crafts must be critically considered alongside not only current art values, but also those of design, architecture, industry and a changing society - as well as the traditions and changing ideals of the crafts themselves. I believe that many contemporary crafts practitioners need to assess whose values and ideals they are really pursuing and to what end, and how much they may have lost by ignoring or denying important aspects of the traditions and material culture histories of their practice.

Great works - whether paintings, pots, figures or furniture - are usually made by imaginative and expressive people who have a wide and very informed knowledge of their materials, skills and tools and the functional and symbolic histories of the forms they are working with, that they can call on perhaps unconsciously and intuitively. While passionate about their work, these people are usually also working self-critically - and confidently - within a very informed, if inexplicable, understanding of their field and of contemporary society. What they make will still be recognised as great, important or significant works - with or without the label of 'art'.

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[581] Adrian Forty 'Debate' *Journal of Design History* 6 2 1993 131. See also Peter Timms, on *Arts Today* ABC radio with Julie Copeland 30 Nov 1996 (see Chapter 5 'Reviewing crafts ideals')

[582] Refer to Susanne Frantz, Chapter 1, for her view on this issue

I believe that the pursuit of art ideals has been *both* truth, because it was extremely liberating in the challenges it offered about new ways of thinking about the crafts, *and* a trap, because art ideals have been so limiting in their denial of, and dominance over, other values.

The success of any work depends on the critical understanding each craftsperson has about their relationship to all the areas they are working in and on the way that they resolve that understanding, for themselves and for others, in their work.

Plate 27: Robert Baines
(see page 210) *The Entropy of Red - Table*, sterling silver, gilt and lacquer, made in Melbourne in 1995. (53 x 28 x 28cm)

Robert Baines (b.1949) is both a jeweller and metalsmith, and is internationally regarded for his scientific and art historical research into ancient goldsmithing techniques, which shows that stylistic features are often determined by technical opportunities and constraints.

The Entropy of Red suite comprises a table, a trumpet and a crown, each formed through intricate metalsmithing constructions that provide, in the end, the form of the item without its functionality. Each work includes an element of red, providing an ancient association with love and sacrifice. In *Table*, the red is in the form of a fallen lacquer petal. These works are not only magnificent for their astonishing construction, but are also challenging for the way we must read what we know of these particular forms, through the surprise of his use of this particular process to make them. In direct contrast to the modernist aesthetic of 'form following function', Baines explores an aesthetic consciously based on decoration and technical processes.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Select bibliography
Appendix 2: Scope of research, contents pages:
The Crafts Movement in Australia: a history
Appendix 3: List of journals
Appendix 4: List of Photographs

Appendix 1: Select Bibliography

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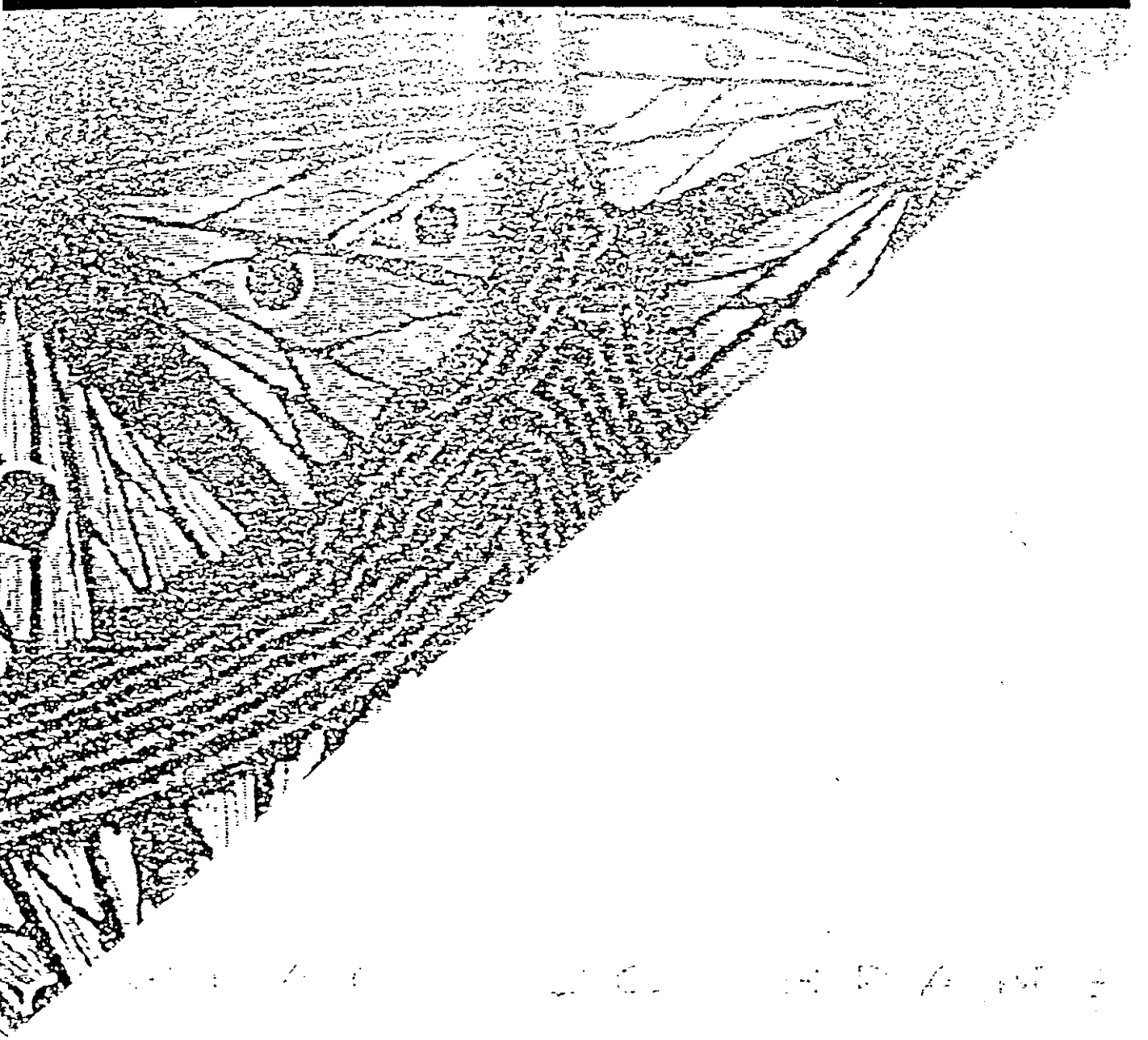
Appendix 2: Scope of research, contents pages:
The Crafts Movement in Australia: a history

THE CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA : A HISTORY



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2. Art - Australia - History. 3. Design - Australia - History. 4. Art and Society - Australia. I. Title.

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Page ii-iii: Bogong Moth was designed by Bruce Goold in 1990 as a screenprinted furnishing fabric for Chez Mambo, part of the Sydney-based company Mambo Graphics, which from 1985 commissioned artists to design for its popular surf fashion range, 100% Mambo. MAAS/Sue Stafford

Facing page: Les Blakebrough's *Strawberry Bowl* was made in porcelain, with a cobalt glaze, red and gold lustres and red enamel, in Hobart in 1988. (16.5 x 27.5 cm) Collection MAAS
UT/John Farrow

Design and desktop layout by Di Quick
Printed in Singapore by Kyodo Printing

This project was assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

It is seven years since the Crafts Board made the decision to commission a comprehensive chronological record of the events, influences and development of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia from 1945 to 1988. In that time the crafts have seen extraordinary development and changes in philosophy, practice and cultural influence. Craftspeople now frequently work closely with architects and interior designers; some work with industry; others take part in major art exhibitions.

The Visual Arts/Craft Board wishes to thank Grace Cochrane for her painstaking and scrupulous research. She was clearly given a monumental task, as at the start of the project, there were few published studies of Australian Craft practice, even after almost fifty years of development.

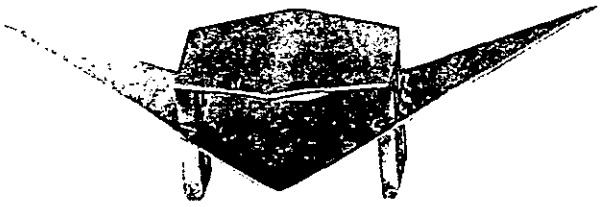
As this is one of the first histories of a contemporary crafts movement anywhere in the world, and because it has been done so well, the book should become a most important reference work not only for Australian crafts but also for contemporary crafts internationally.

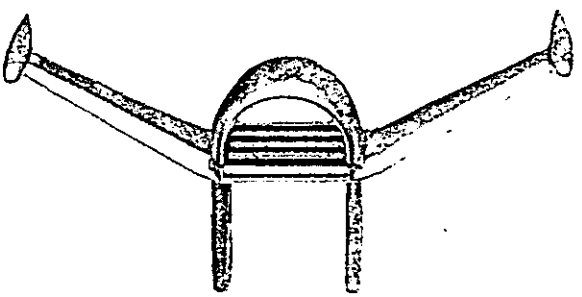
We also believe that this history will be invaluable for scholars and for a wide range of visual arts practitioners. The skills, attitudes and achievements chronicled here are of such importance that they must be seen as an essential part of the body of knowledge upon which all of us working in the visual arts and crafts should regularly draw.

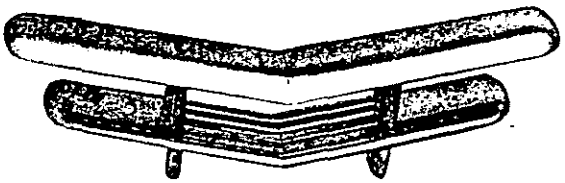
The Crafts Council of Australia, The Australia Council, the steering committee, and Grace in particular are to be congratulated for the foresight and unwavering perseverance that have brought this book into being.

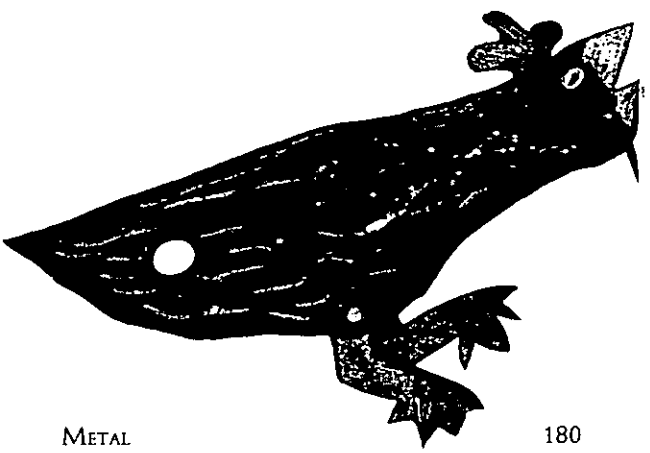
Pamille Berg

Pamille Berg
Chairperson
Visual Arts/Craft Board
Australia Council
1992









Andrew Last's aluminium pony-tail clips based on aeroplane designs were ma Wagga Wagga in 1991. (I 5 x 13.5 x 5.5 cm)

Catherine Truman's Choc Brooches *were made in E lime wood with paint and r metals in Adelaide in 1991 (Approx 4 x 8 cm)* Crow Brooch *made in sterling si and 24 carat gold in 1990. (Approx 4 x 4 cm)*

Appendix 3: List of journals

Addit
Adelaide Review
Age newspaper
Age Literary Review
American Craft
Architecture Australia
Architecture in Australia
Art and Australia
Art Monthly Australia
Art Network
Artforce
Artlink
Arts National
Arts Queensland
Ausglass
Australia Council annual reports
Australian Antique Collector
Australian Handweaver and Spinner
Australian Home Beautiful
Australian Women's Weekly
Batik Associoation newsletter
Block
Broadsheet
Ceramics: Art and Perception
Ceramist
Craft (British)
Craft ACT
Craft Arts International
Craft Australia
Craft Australia Yearbooks
Craft Horizons
Craft International
Craft Realities
Crafts Victoria
Crafts NSW
Craft Tasmania
Craftlink (Queensland)
Crafts Council of Australia annual reports
CraftWest
Design Australia
Design in Australia
JMGA newsletter
Journal of Issues in Art Education
Lacemaker
Lemel
Meanjin
Nation Review
National Times newspaper
NAVA Visual Arts newsletter
Object
Pottery in Australia
Praxis M
S.A. Crafts
Smarts
Studio
Sunday Telegraph newspaper
Sunday Times newspaper
Sydney Morning Herald newspaper
Sydney Review
Territory Craft
Textile Fibre Forum
TRAIN newsletter
West Australian newspaper
West
Words on Paper
*Also specialist group newsletters,
minutes,
files
*Also exhibition catalogues

Appendix 4: List of photographs and credits

Plate 1: Stephen Bowers
(before contents page; text page 196)
Cockylorum 1,2,3, detail of porcelain plate decorated with painted, splashed and airbrushed underglaze slips under a clear glaze, made in Adelaide in 1991. (12 x 62cm) Collection: University of New South Wales. Photo: Michel Kluvanek.

Plate 2: Catherine Truman
(before page 1; text page 183)
Piecemeal, boat carved in English lime wood, with hanko ink and paint; fish pieces carved in mother-of-pearl, with ink, made in Adelaide in 1992. (boat 20 x 6 x 3: fish pieces 3 x 3 x 1.5cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Grant Hancock.

Plate 3: Gerry Wedd
(before page 11; see text page 183)
Love Trophy 1, terracotta urn thrown by Mark Heidenreich, decorated by Gerry Wedd (b.1957) with coloured slips and applied decoration, made in Adelaide in 1993. (183 x 54cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 4: Marea Gazzard and Mona Hessing: *Clay + Fibre* 1973
(after page 18; see text page 18)
In this exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Marea Gazzard (b1928) exhibited large handbuilt vessel forms with Mona Hessing's (b.1933) woven hangings. Photo: Don Gazzard.

Plate 5: Valerie Kirk
(before page 33; see text pages 153-4)
Tapestry, *Pineforest Quilt - Applied, Used, Discarded,* woven in mixed yarns on a cotton weft in Canberra in 1994. (150 x 90cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 6: Annan Fabrics 1941-1954
(after page 60; text page 60)
(Alexandra) Nance Mackenzie (b1912, left) and Anne Outlaw (1891-1991) screenprint fabrics in their studio in Mosman, Sydney in the 1940s. Photo: Max Dupain.

Plate 7: Peter Rushforth
(after page 62; text page 62)
Blossom jars, *Landscape* and *Form and Spirit*, stoneware with jun glaze (left) and tenmoku and iron glaze (right), made and woodfired at Shipley, Blue Mountains, NSW 1990. (27 x 14 and 42 x 18cm). Tenmoku jar: Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: unattributed, *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 3 1991.

Plate 8: Harold Hughan
(after page 73; text page 73)
This photograph was taken for Hughan's first retrospective exhibition of 440 pots at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1969. Catalogue Kenneth Hood *H. R. Hughan Retrospective Exhibition,* undated. Photographer unidentified.

Plate 9: Mark Thompson
(before page 76; text page 99)
Buy Australian Maid, high fired clay with enamels and lustres, porcelain flowers, sterling silver wires and kangaroo, braid and velvet, handbuilt in Adelaide in 1977. (h. 65cm) Photo: John Delacour.

Plate 10: Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott
(after page 86; text page 86)
Two bottles, *Unravelled* and *Undulating*, blown by Ben Edols and wheel-carved by Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott in Sydney in 1997. (tallest 75 x 11cm) Photo: from catalogue invitation, Glass Artists Gallery 1997. *Unravelled*: Collection Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 11: Grant and Mary Featherston
(after page 98; text page 98)
Catalogue cover, *Grant and Mary Featherston* Furniture City 11-23 August 1975.

Plate 12: Ewa Pachucka
(before page 108; text page 134)
Detail of installation *Arcadia: Landscape and bodies*, crocheted figure in polypropylene and hemp over polyester foam padding, made in Hobart in 1975-77. (Total installation size 244 x 396cm). Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: courtesy Crafts Australia.

Plate 13: Peter Travis
(after page 120; text page 120)
Peter Travis tests a kite in Wentworth Park, Sydney, before his exhibition at David Jones Gallery in 1973. Photo: courtesy of Peter Travis.

Plate 14: Emily Kame Kngwarreye
(after page 134; text page 134)
Textile length, *Untitled*, silk batik made at Utopia, Central Australia in 1988. (180 x 90cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 15: Klaus Moje
(before page 145; text page 187)
Bowl-form, fused mosaic glass, made in Canberra in 1991. (7 x 44.5 x 55cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 16: Brian Hirst
(after page 170; text page 170)
Bowl, *Votive Bowl*, blown-cast glass, hand-finished, decorated with gold lustre and diamond-point engraving, made in Sydney in 1992. (29 x 34 x 30cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney Photograph: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 17: Liz Williamson
(after page 182; text page 183)
Land folds (detail) handwoven in wool, wool blend, wool lycra, copper wire, nylon monofilament and gold threads, and (right) *Tear* (detail), cotton and polyester threads, both made in Sydney in 1993 and 1996. (40 x 165 and 40 x 160cm) Photos: courtesy artist.

Plate 18: Carlier Makigawa
(after page 183; text page 184)
Brooch, 925 sterling silver and monel, made in Melbourne in 1991. (5 x 13cm approx.) Photo: Kate Gollings.

Plate 19: Marc Newson
(after page 184; text page 184)
Embryo Chair designed by Marc Newson, commissioned by the Powerhouse Museum, and made in neoprene, polyurethane and steel by DeDeCe in Sydney in 1988. (80 x 70 x 77cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 20: Yvonne Koolmatrie
(after page 188; text page 188)
Yabbie trap, *eel trap* and *fish trap*, woven in sedge rush (lepidosperma canesens) by Ngarrindjeri artist Yvonne Koolmatrie, lower Murray River region, South Australia 1993. (45 x 46 x 76, 57 x 96, 38 x 88cm.) Collection Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Plate 21: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott
(after page 195; text page 196)
Family portrait, woodfired porcelain, made at Finch Hatton, Queensland, in 1996. Photo: catalogue invitation, Rex Irwin Gallery, 1996.

Plate 22: Stephen Bowers
(after page 196; text page 196)
Urn, *Chintz vase with Cockatoos*, underglaze and on-glaze enamel and lustre decoration on a terracotta-earthenware clay, made by Mark Heidenreich, and designed and decorated by Stephen Bowers in Adelaide in 1994. (85 x 56cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 23: Rod Bamford
(after page 197; text page 198)
This ceramic form, *Cone Aspire*, was made in five parts using a range of production processes including moulding, brick-extrusion, glazing and transfer-printing, in Sydney in 1988-89. (180 x 63cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 24: Rod Bamford
(after page 198; text page 198)
Insensible Order 2 is an installation of industrial 165 components made from industrial porcelain in the Kohler factory, USA, in 1989 (2.2 x 1.1 x 1.1m). Photo: Rod Bamford.

Plate 25: Jenny Kee
(before page 201; text pages 101, 158)
Flying Oz outfit: includes *Flying Oz* printed jacquard silk (1984); and *Flying Oz 200* dress and *Kee Oz Collage* jacket, hand knitted in wool, angora, cashmere, mohair and alpaca yarns, designed by Jenny Kee in Sydney between 1984 and 1988. Collection Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Plate 26: Susan Cohn
(after page 216; text pages 184, 216)
Cohncave, bowl made of two sheets of pierced stainless steel, anodised, with stainless steel rim (and packaging), designed by Susan Cohn and made by Alessi, Italy, 1992. (diam.50cm) Photo: Kate Gollings. Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 27: Robert Baines
(before appendices; text page 210)
The Entropy of Red - Table, made of sterling silver, gilt and lacquer in Melbourne in 1995. (53 x 28 x 28cm) Photo: Gary Sommerfield